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Partisan Review 2

The Changing Culture of the University

with contributions from:

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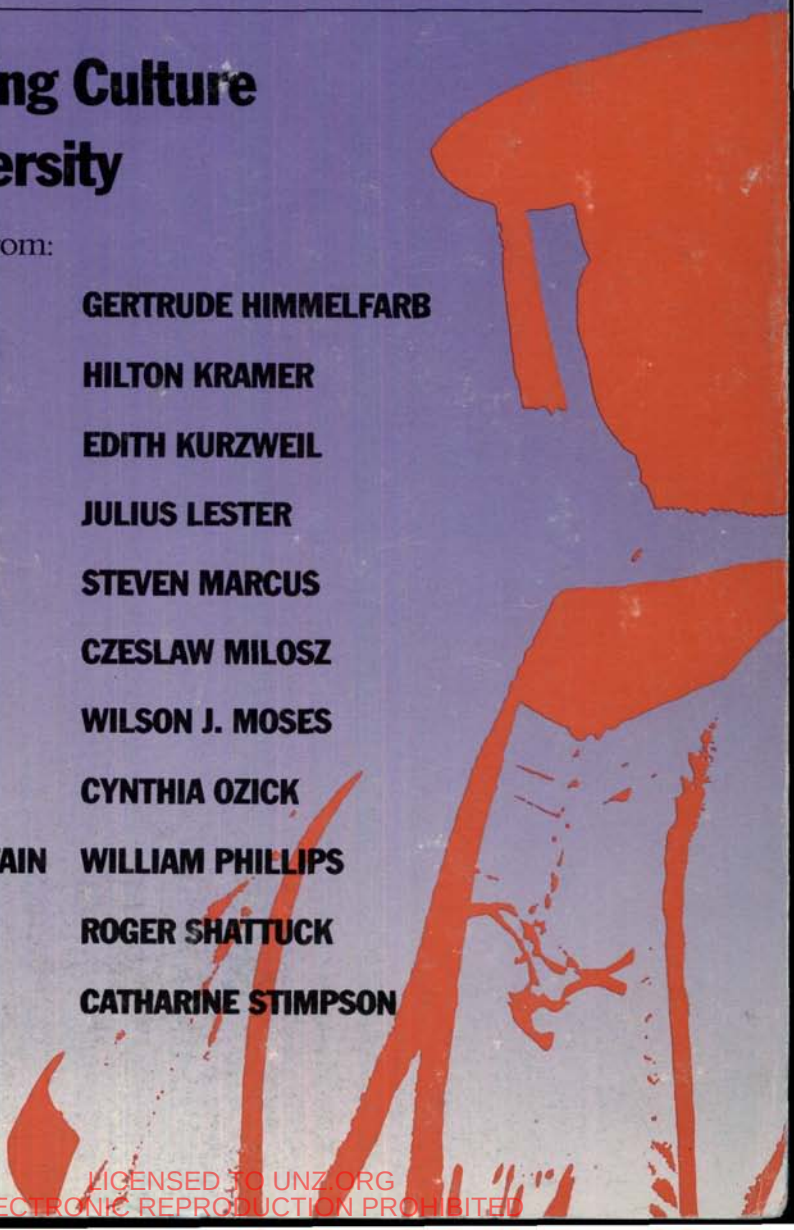

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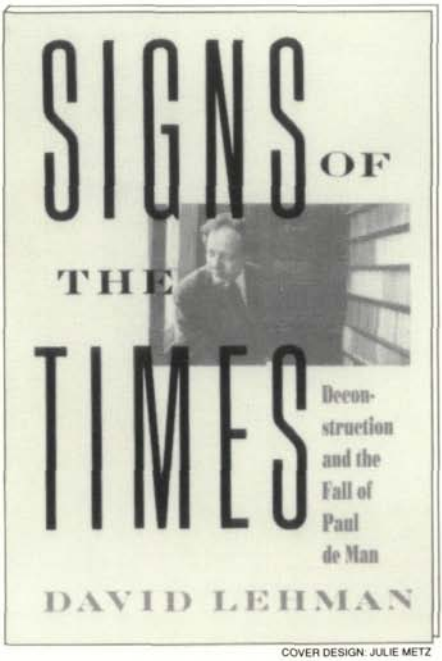

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Editor's Note: At a reception opening the conference, Jon Westling, President ad interim of Boston University, welcomed the participants and guests. And Celeste Colgan, Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, spoke to us of the interest of the Endowment in the issues we would be addressing during the following days.

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Introduction

It is unusual for *Partisan Review* to publish an entire issue on one subject, but then our conference on "The Changing Culture of the University" was an unusual event – which was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Joanna S. and Daniel Rose Foundation. As you will note from the names of our participants, and from the topics, we tried to include experts from most of the humanist disciplines and attempted to cover many of the issues that preoccupy not only humanities scholars within the university but their students and the general public as well. And we assumed that what happens in our educational institutions in one way or another ultimately – however indirectly – will be of concern or will touch every citizen. That is why so much has been written in recent years about the dire state of our universities, our high schools, and our elementary schools; and why blame for the fact that our students know less upon graduating from any of them than their counterparts in other countries, like a football, has been bounced around from one to another, and to other culprits, such as the media, the family, the state of the world, or psychological factors.

By bringing together scholars from a variety of disciplines and persuasions, we attempted to approach these central problems within our culture from an extra-disciplinary perspective – that is, we purposely arranged to have panelists with opposing view points and approaches confront what we consider to be essential quandaries. Instead of organizing, as is the custom, a conference with like-minded "experts," or with people who share numerous basic assumptions, we set out to initiate a dialogue which, we hope, will lead to more open discussions among "liberals," "leftists," "neoconservatives," "conservatives," and "critical thinkers." To put it bluntly, instead of advocating what have come to be known as politically correct or incorrect positions, we wanted to do away with the confusions these positions have engendered in the minds of the noninitiated, and to find what for want of a better generalization might be called a middle ground. Still, we also assumed that such a middle ground cannot be arrived at by settling on a compromise, or by building a political consensus, but only by an in-depth and honest examination of the chief dilemmas plaguing our society. Such an examination, we decided, squarely must face the fact that much of what is offered as education is meant also to further personal and political interests of professors, often unintentionally, and that the only way to undercut biases and *parti pris* positions is to openly air their underlying aims and assumptions. Moreover, the topics themselves reveal that we did not want to get caught up in the discussions relevant to specific disciplines but to

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examine the university (which itself incorporates many differences) in relation to the culture in which it is embedded. That is why William Phillips began by pointing out that "it both influences and is influenced by the media, popular culture, the culture of freelance writers and intellectuals, and political thinking on both sides of the spectrum."

William Phillips and his respondents, Morris Dickstein and Jean Bethke Elshtain, addressed issues of radicalism and pseudoradicalism in their historical and philosophical contexts, and there was not much dispute that mass education, though an absolute necessity in a democracy, not only tends to lower our levels of expectation but conceals a certain disrespect for learning by many students. (We all were touched by the student in the audience who spoke out, stating that we might have been generalizing too much, that there are students who spend their vacations in libraries.) Phillips also talked of the homogenization of the culture, which had formerly been divided into the serious and the popular – a theme that came to a head in the fairly heated arguments between Hilton Kramer, Robert Brustein, Julius Lester and the audience in the session on "The Impact of the Media." But Phillips himself was most concerned with demonstrating that by teaching students esoteric theories of literature they probably cannot grasp, they are denied a more traditional education which would allow them to understand and evaluate literary works as well as esthetic criteria. And his provocative statement that black theoreticians and radical feminists, by contending that these esthetic criteria themselves conceal political and gender interest, are being reductionist – unless such contentions are carefully elaborated – drew the sort of fire and thoughtful discussion we had hoped for, not only from his resondents in this session but throughout the conference.

To some extent, the fact that these theories are anchored in departments of English and of literature set the tone more than we had anticipated. Next time around, we expect to have a more "balanced" representation, to include participants from economics and psychology, and most of all from the hard sciences and possibly from law schools.

In my own session, on "The Changing Curriculum: Then and Now," I compared the rigorous demands at City College in the 1940s to today's lesser requirements, because I have observed that students prefer to be pushed to excel and to become competent at whatever they will be doing after they get their degrees, even as they shop around for gut courses and good grades. We debated the extent to which what used to be the curriculum had turned into a canon; the relevance of Allan Bloom's and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's positions; what constitutes academic orthodoxy; and the extent of the impact of changing values about ethnicity, religion, class, and gender on the university and our culture. Although we did not resolve any of these issues, our debate itself brought

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up more and more of the intricate links and differences plaguing culture and education, writers and the media, Marxists and feminists, African Americans and Latino-Americans – which inevitably find their way into, or originate in, the university.

The Saturday morning panel was more focused on what goes on inside the university, on "The Revolt Against Tradition" by readers, writers and critics, and on the ways in which "extraliterary" facts and agendas are being expressed and conceptualized. In his brilliant presentation, Robert Alter elaborated on the growing chasm between the way literature is being taught in the university and the way educated people outside the academy tend to read, and he deplored the fact that sweeping programs for evaluating and transforming human existence lead to a canon-making mindset that judges a work of art in relation to its program. He was followed by incisive, thoughtful commentaries by Denis Donoghue and Steven Marcus. Inevitably, Donoghue's discussion of the "privileging of political terms over esthetic terms, and his elaboration on Alter's comments on Frederic Jameson's and Leo Bersani's analyses of *Ulysses* were taken up by a number of professors of English. They and others mentioned much of the vast literature on *Ulysses* and, inevitably, got into disputes internal to Joyce studies, into both the advantages and pitfalls of doing "specialist" literary criticism, and on modernism and postmodernism in general – with all their slippery definitions and intended and unintended implications. Steven Marcus, among other things, cautioned against totalizing and absolutizing these terms, and against simplifying the complexity of these positions – a point Alter spelled out when stating that he finds pseudorevolutionary gestures at the expense of *Ulysses* offensive. Still, everyone agreed that there is no innocent reading of literature, and that such an "admission" is very different from advancing an ideological, political program which, in its crudest form, would be some sort of socialist-realist interpretation.

Brigitte Berger approached "The Idea of the University" from a sociological perspective and defended the classical liberal tradition against attacks by both "left" and "right" ideologies. Extrapolating from her empirical research in communities, and emphasizing demographic factors, she went on to outline changes within the university – from its earlier meritocratic functions to utilitarian and certifying ones, and some of the consequences of the rise of research empires on graduate and undergraduate education. But while her attack on "the traditionalist's suspicion of modern consciousness" went unchallenged, her criticism of the "Children of Caliban" as the destroyers of the liberal values of rationality, hard work, and efficiency drew fire by the proponents of radical change. "There is a wide gulf between the sociological proposition that knowledge is culturally embedded and the claim that all

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knowledge reflects politics – be these of class, race, age or gender" – argued Berger, and then suggested that this proposition be discussed rationally and tested empirically within the university. Nathan Glazer went on to stress the certifying functions of the university, and to differentiate between introducing multicultural ideas and allocating jobs in line with racial criteria. Catharine Stimpson, on the other hand, held that "the social relations of class, race, age, or gender are, in part, political relations." But she shared Berger's "passionate commitments to the principle of freedom of inquiry," though chiding her for her "hyperbolic language of crisis." Ultimately, Stimpson suggested the university as the site of cognitive/rational activity. In response to Stimpson and to challenges from the floor, Berger explained that, in her empirical research, she had found that, for instance, radical demands for childcare would primarily benefit middle-class mothers, since many lower-class women's needs are more centered on their children: many of them prefer to stay home rather than take low-paying jobs – the only ones they can land given their lack of skills. At this point, of course, "the personal had become political" and, I might add, the general mood became less than rational. From the standpoint of a historian, argued Ronald Radosh rather passionately from the floor, *Partisan Review* had invited too many literary intellectuals, and not enough people from history and economics. I assume he was only partly disappointed in the subsequent panel, which featured Cleanth Brooks, the venerable New Critic, on "The Remaking of the Canon," and whose respondents were, in addition to the literary critics Wilson Moses and Lionel Abel, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb.

"The term canon actually distorts and artificializes something that grew up much more naturally over the centuries," began Cleanth Brooks while telling us that he had been introduced to it at the age of five via Homer's *Iliad*. Of course, he went on, the great books must be well taught, especially to students who know little about reading, who come to us fairly unprepared to distinguish a good book from a bad one – a condition that existed already in the 1930s. He decried the habit of the newest critics who reject literary merit as the basis for any canon and who select books in line with their political concerns; and the practice of shifting the issue from the acquisition of knowledge and discipline to that of social therapy. This phenomenon is not entirely new, he stated, as he told of some English professors over forty years ago who were bored with literature but found it useful to teach Marxism, and of others who were teaching it by psychoanalyzing literary characters and their authors. Instead, Mr. Brooks concluded, it is through great literature that we can best observe how human beings behave, how they succeed or fail, rather than through philosophy or even history. W. E. B. Du Bois, the African-American intellectual and political leader did so, he reminded us, as he

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walked arm-in-arm with Balzac and Dumas, with Aristotle and Aurelius – across the color line.

Gertrude Himmelfarb as well was in a reminiscing mood: she contrasted her own introduction to Anglo-Saxon literature by mainly Protestant teachers as her means of leaving the ghetto culture – which she described as a welcome and necessary process. Although her background was diametrically opposed to Cleanth Brook's, she emphasized that they shared a respect for particular great books and the conviction that these were of universal value and accessible to everyone. Himmelfarb's point also was picked up by Wilson Moses, whose mother told him the story of *Moby Dick* at the age of five, and for whom, not much later, *The Book House for Children* became his introduction to world literature – which included mostly European myths and legends but African, Asian, and American Indian ones as well. It seemed natural to him that "literature and history, music and biography should go hand in hand," and that "great literature was associated with great lessons." (As he was speaking, I kept thinking that my early experiences in Vienna were nearly identical, that we were carried away by some of the same tales and lessons, and that our both being upset at Shakespeare's description of Jews and Moors might have sensitized us to spot and then combat discrimination even before we had our own personal, unpleasant experiences.) Lionel Abel, speaking on the lessons of literature, dissociated it from notions of a fixed canon. He illustrated this point by showing that some have read *Lolita* as a story about love, while others have argued it was about sex or violence. But "you cannot read *Lolita* without confronting the fact that Dolly Hayes is twelve when she is first seduced and raped by the man who is to become her stepfather," responded Catharine Stimpson.

At this point, the discussion moved from "defenses" of the canon to questions of taste, to specific works, and to the inclusion and/or exclusion of women. Gertrude Himmelfarb now pointed to the need to differentiate between representation and merit, and Cleanth Brooks to the fact that what gets into the canon is a product of culture, of tradition, and varies over time – a notion William Phillips then elaborated upon further. Culture, Jean Elshtain now reminded us, is influenced also by movements, such as the women's movement of the late 1960s – which engendered the rediscovery of, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft, whose argument with Rousseau, in turn, enriched the agonistic community. And in response to a question, Wilson Moses outlined "Four Definitions of Afrocentricity," and then elaborated, among other issues, on the questions these definitions themselves raise about the teaching of this tradition, and about "neointegrationism and separate black curricula for black boys." In the end, it was agreed, syllabi in most universities still are

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under the control of individual professors, so that what is taught is not as uniform as is thought. How we teach is as important as what we teach, concluded Catharine Stimpson, and pleaded to include the teaching of the Holy Bible – not just for its content but in its context.

The Sunday morning session was turned over to writers, to Mary Gordon, Czeslaw Milosz, and Cynthia Ozick. (I must leave out Christopher Ricks, because he did not want us to print his comments, and Harold Brodkey, whose lawyer wrote that our transcript "does not reflect what he said.") Every one of the contributions by this panel was more autobiographical, more personal, more concerned with issues of what writing means and with the contradictions of being both a writer and a university teacher – an oxymoron, according to Cynthia Ozick – than the preceding ones. Yet, when Ozick quoted Matthew Arnold saying, "Try to possess one great literature at least, unlike your own. And the more unlike your own, the better," she was in fact repeating what Wilson Moses had stated in his introduction.

Without summarizing what any of these writers said, however, I thought that there was an implicit confusion among assumptions that works are great because great men wrote them, what they said, and how they said it. In spite of the fact that some geniuses were prone to awful prejudices, the panelists seemed to agree that by introducing students to these works in some way or another – trusting them, and having the confidence that after discussing these "classics," they would be able to generalize from their stories, myths, legends, and so on – they would then be able to "use" this material for their own ends, to identify not with this or that man but with the spirit of opposition to the time, the advocacy of revolt, the insights. In the process, students are bound to develop not only writing skills but to learn discrimination, to argue with or against the specific writer. Another point we may not have stressed sufficiently was the fact that the so-called canon consisting of white European males actually incorporates all sorts of Asian, African, and other myths and traditions in the stories and works themselves – in addition to the anti-Semitism and other biases our panelists and audience ended up addressing at length and from all possible angles. Inevitably, there was much disagreement on whether or not you can create writers in a university setting. According to Cynthia Ozick, "a workshop will not give you the gift, and it will not give you the character to persist." Professors in charge of such programs, of course, disagreed. Daphne Merkin, responding to Harold Brodkey, tied together a number of lengthy arguments over the anti-Semitic bent of some of our greatest writers such as Dostoevsky, T. S. Eliot, and Simone Weil. She concluded that one cannot try to reduce these complex questions to notions of integrity versus gift but ought to "include other pernicious traits beside

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anti-Semitism." And William Phillips closed the conference, regretting only that we had not resolved all these questions.

It would be foolish of me to promise that we will do so at our next conference. But we did open up a much-needed discussion among writers and critics, professors and students, which is of interest to all of our citizens. Yes, we did have a majority of people from literature, but then *Partisan Review* is a literary as well as an intellectual and political publication. Still, there hovered an overriding concern, a larger issue than that of "The Changing Culture of the University" *per se*. It was the question of our national culture, much of which gets its clues from the university. Whether or not issues of multiculturalism or anti-Semitism are going to bring us together as a nation or split us up into many cultures fighting over the spoils none of them any longer will be willing to produce, or whether we eventually will manage to recognize common interests and to unite around common goals – however indirectly – are implicit in how we deal with what we addressed at this conference. In that sense, of course, the political questions are central. I am certain that even my most radical multiculturalist colleagues do not intend, for instance, to have Black History Month teach elementary school children that "we are learning that white people have made us slaves and now we have to fight them all the time," as I heard a youngster say on a talk show a few days ago. In other words, while making sure to eradicate one sort of racism, we also must watch out not to encourage another one, or to nurture the sorts of nationalisms that ultimately will divide the country into ethnic interest groups. How to create an equitable society has been addressed by thinkers – both within and outside the "canon" for as long as we know. And that really is the central question which both the "right" and the "left" must address. Do we do so by assigning Plato or Malcolm X, Freud or EST, Jane Austen or Toni Morrison? Or is the way we discuss any or all of them even more important? It is around such questions that we can create a dialogue within the university – provided everyone agrees to speak honestly and boldly. We hope to explore these matters further – at our next conference.

EDITH KURZWEIL

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The Crisis in Our Culture

Edith Kurzweil: I want to welcome all of you to the first session of this conference, "The Changing Culture of the University" and I'm glad to see so many of you this early. I'm certain we'll fill up more later on. And I want to make sure that you all realize that we'd like participation from you after each of the sessions. We're also planning to publish the papers as well as an edited version of the discussions which will follow each of the sessions. We do have quite a packed program, so I'm not going to tell you anything more, and I want to introduce our speakers. In the center is William Phillips, one of the founding editors of *Partisan Review*, who has run the magazine for all these years, ever since the mid-thirties. His memoir, *A Partisan View*, was published in 1984. He is going to talk on the first topic, "The Crisis in our Culture." I suppose we all have heard about that. He is going to tell you what it's all about, and you'll probably add some more things you see as crisis-causing, if he doesn't cover them all. The respondents are, on my right, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Centennial Professor of Political Science and Political Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. Her most recent book is *Women and War* and her next book, *Power Trips and Other Journeys*, will be published in a few weeks. Morris Dickstein, on William Phillips's right, is Professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Faculty of the City University of New York. His last book is *Gates of Eden*. He is now working on a book on the culture of the 1930s. I don't want to take any more time, and we'll turn to William Phillips

William Phillips: Those of you who were here at the opening of the conference last evening may have noticed that the atmosphere was all sugar and honey. Today the fireworks start. I have the broadest topic of the whole conference, so my approach is necessarily a broad one, and obviously there are some aspects of the question I don't go into and many that perhaps I don't go into in sufficient depth.

The culture of the university is only a part of the general culture, to some extent a separate and alienated part, yet it both influences and is influenced by the media, popular culture, the culture of freelance writers and intellectuals, and political thinking on both sides of the spectrum.

In this respect, it is inexact to speak of the culture as though it were monolithic. Still, there are deep as well as superficial connections between the various parts of the culture, and it is possible to make some generalizations, though there is always the danger of overgeneralization, in order to arrive at a sense of the basic trends and direction of the culture as a whole – always keeping in mind that its variety, complexity,

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and contradictions are so great as to defy easy or total summation.

Perhaps the most useful way to begin is to examine the concept of postmodernism, particularly as it is used by some of its proponents. I have resisted this somewhat facile term, as it seemed to confuse distinct cultural change with simple chronology. It also sometimes appeared that postmodernism was modernism by another name, and that it could be seen as little more than an extension or an extreme version of modernism into a new time and a new social and intellectual climate. But recently I have been persuaded that indeed there have been so many shifts in the cultural scene that a new term is indicated. And whatever the inadequacies of the term postmodern might be, its very confusion of the chronological with the conceptual makes it a good candidate for the task of defining, if only approximately and speculatively, the changes in our culture today. The pertinence of the term also is enhanced by its possessive use by those who regard themselves as charter members, so to speak, and celebrators of the current cultural atmosphere.

Modernism applied mostly and most clearly to the arts, while postmodernism takes in the whole of contemporary culture. In its extreme form, modernism was most dramatically defined by Ortega y Gasset in *The Dehumanization of Art*, originally published in 1925. It was to some extent a prophetic work, though some of its prognostications did not pan out, at least not in the ideal form described by Ortega. But its main thesis pointed in a significant direction. Ortega argued – or perhaps I should say posited – that the new art was nonhumanist, that it was devoid of the kind of explicit content typical of the nineteenth-century novel. It was an art for the initiated, not for the masses. Thus it was what is now called elitist. It was not serious in the moral connotations of the term; and it was imbued with the spirit of play. Above all, this dehumanized art explored the possibilities of the medium. Ortega's examples necessarily were not pure; most of them were drawn from the new music. In painting he cited the tendency toward abstraction and the obliteration of human shapes.(Picasso was the exemplar of the new.) In literature, he spoke mostly about Pirandello. But the supreme modernists, Joyce, Beckett, and Stein, fit into his schemes, though Beckett is now sometimes classified as a postmodernist. But, of course, Ortega could not have foreseen Bartok and Schoenberg, or Stevens, Yeats, and Eliot, or Pollock and Newman. Ortega's world was rather segregated: his theory did not – or could not – encompass such figures as Mann and Proust and Kafka, who were surely modernists, by any definition, but were not dehumanizers and experimentalists in the strictest sense of the term. Yet their work belongs, if only partially, in the category of unrealistic, unpopular, self-contained fiction.

Stephen Spender, in his book, *The Struggle for the Modern*, coming

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later, and being less of a theoretical advocate than Ortega, expanded the idea of the modern to include a larger variety of modernist works. Spender distinguishes between the modern and what he calls the purely contemporary, which includes figures like Shaw, Wells, and Bennett. According to Spender, modernism, which is represented by writers such as Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Pound, Yeats, and Virginia Woolf, projects a "vision of the whole." It also expresses the tension, most notably in Eliot, between the past and the present. And what the modernists were doing, says Spender, "could be done only in ways which are today sometimes dismissed as "experimental." Furthermore, says Spender:

> The modernist is acutely conscious of the contemporary scene, but he does not accept its values. To the modernist, it seems that a world of unprecedented phenomena has today cut us off from the life of the past, and in doing so from traditional consciousness . . . we must be fully aware of our predicament which is that of past consciousness living in the present.

In addition, claims Spender:

> The art of the past is attached to traditions, values, symbols, objects, nature, which had, until modern times, a relative stability. Modern art moves within a world which, in all these respects, is shifting.

Spender also emphasizes the formal qualities of modernism when he says:

> The quality which is called modern shows in the realized sensibility of style and form more than in the subject matter.

Finally, argues Spender, the essence of modernism lies in its awareness of a fragmented world and in its representation of this world in a highly personal manner.

One cannot fail to note how much of what Spender describes as modernist extends into the spirit of what is being characterized as postmodern. In fact, this is a point emphasized by Frank Kermode and Anthony Giddens: Kermode thinks that so-called postmodernism is actually an extreme version of the qualities of modernism, while Giddens believes that postmodernism is a radicalized modernism.

Irving Howe, writing a little later, began to talk of the possible end of modernism. He listed a number of characteristics of modernism,

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some of which seem to suggest a forecast of the contemporary scene. According to Howe, modernism has the following elements: the problem of belief is exacerbated, sometimes to the point of dismissal; the idea of esthetic order is abandoned or radically modified; perversity – surprise, excitement, shock, terror, affront – becomes a dominant motif; a whole new sense of character, structure, and the role of the protagonist appears in the novel; nihilism becomes the central preoccupation, the inner demon, at the heart of modern literature.

Lionel Trilling, in an essay, "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature," published in 1961, made an even larger generalization, one that also sounds as though it could have been written today:

> [Thomas Mann] once said that all his work could be understood as an effort to free himself from the middle class, and this, of course, will serve to define the chief contention of all modern literature.

However, it might be added that only solid members of the middle class talked of freeing themselves. Similarly, if I may quote myself, in a piece published at about the same time, I wrote that "much modern writing is centered on some obsessive theme or some biased image of human affairs, growing out of the fixations of the author."

One of the reasons modernism could not easily apply to the culture as a whole – I am using the term culture in the intellectual sense of the term, not in the anthropological one – is that it was, let's face it, elitist, and thus described mostly that section of art, music, and literature that reflected the experience of and appealed to an audience that was not a popular one. Postmodernism, however, almost because one of its characteristics is the obliteration of distinctions among high, low, and middlebrow, could extend to the entire culture. One could argue endlessly about the definitions of postmodernism, and there are some differences and contradictions among those who have undertaken to chart its meanings. But there is a general consensus, particularly among its devotees and apologists. At first glance, the new era is dominated culturally by deconstruction and its allied beliefs, by feminist theory, by a black esthetic, by professorial neo-Marxism, by representation, minimalism, and conceptualism in art, by an assault on tradition, by a radical revision of the curriculum and of the idea of the past in general. Broadly speaking, it is fraught with skepticism, almost to the point of nihilism; it rejects the belief in objective literary judgment; it celebrates the reader and the viewer in literature and art; it posits something called the text, which is subject to constant reinterpretation, as the central object in society and the arts; it advocates a negation of moral absolutes and philosophical

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truths, being committed to a high degree of relativism; it carries the concept of democracy into an espousal, at least in practice, of egalitarianism. It is a dominant influence in the academy, where it carries on, with an intensity that sometimes reaches the absurd, an activity known as theory.

Who are the standard-bearers of this new cultural *zeitgeist*? The godfather is, of course, Jacques Derrida, the founder and principal dispenser of deconstruction, who, I must say, is not easy to follow, because of his private associations and playful, self-indulgent prose. The leading disciples, some of whom have moved in other directions, have been Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Stanley Fish, Frank Lentricchia, Jean-François Lyotard, Jonathan Culler, and Fredric Jameson, who combines deconstruction with a brand of Marxism. And of course, there are numerous fellow-travelers. Though they do not always agree, they support each other. Then there is a never-ending stream of epigones, who combine in various degrees deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism, and who quote each other copiously. Most of them write in an academicized version of the official jargon, and are very difficult for anyone outside the fraternity to read. Above all, they talk incessantly of theory, by which they mean their own theory, and they appear to be more interested in their theory than in literature and the other subjects which their theory supposedly is meant to illuminate. In fact, it might be said that the theory supersedes the arts, and it supplants the traditional modes of literary criticism. To anyone who has not read this torrent of postmodern theory and who has not experienced the atmosphere of many universities, it is almost impossible to communicate the abstruse and claustrophobic spirit of this new enterprise. Tsvetan Todorov, who is not one of the most embattled opponents of the new professorial game, in a review of a book by Robert Scholes, made the observation that theory has gone too far, to the point of bypassing literature. And in a review recently in *The New Republic*, Todorov says, and I should like to quote him at length:

> Moreover, the words "modern" and "postmodern" are often employed as calls to action or as insults, rather than as descriptions, so their content is ambiguous. The university, so fond of all isms, is . . . churning up tons of books and articles: Steven Connor's book on "postmodernist culture" contains no less than nineteen pages of bibliography on the subject . . . One no longer reads Lyotard on Duchamp, or even Jameson on Lyotard on Duchamp, but Connor on Jameson on Lyotard on Duchamp. . . . Since the salient feature of postmodernism is thought to be incoherence, why not use this word in an incoherent way?

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Now, as I have said, what is called postmodernism is not limited to the academy, where it takes the form of abstract, obscure and self-referential theory. It also can be said to have gripped a good part of the popular and commercial culture as a whole. Here it manifests itself in a rejection of traditional criteria, thus opening the way to a veritable orgy of new works defying judgement and offering themselves to a highly commercialized art market avid for whatever is publicized as new and fashionable. In the field of art criticism, it is often accompanied by a deflation, to the point of rejection, of the past. The result is confusion, lowering of standards, willful praise and criticism, and a celebration of every new movement, and of the latest artistic and critical turn. One of the casualties in this overhauling, as it were, of the tradition, is the lowering esteem in which the abstract expressionist painters and sculptors are held. They have been mocked as simply expressions of American expansion or as the inflated products of inflationary art opinion. Clement Greenberg, who is known as the critic who articulated the accomplishments of the abstract expressionists, is held in disrepute in many trendy quarters.

Cleve Gray, in *Partisan Review*, and Robert Hughes, in *The New Republic*, recently have written revealing accounts of the commercialization and the lowering standards of painting and sculpture. Hughes's comment is devastating:

> In the 1980s . . . the driven consumption and regurgitation of images and reputations became our main cultural metaphor. Never had there been so many artists, so much art, so many collectors, so many inflated claims, so little sense of measure. The inflation of the market, the victory of promotion over connoisseurship, the manufacture of art-related glamor, the embattled state of museums – these will not vanish at the touch of a wand.

This does not mean complete effacement of talent. As Hughes, himself, says, there are a number of outstanding painters and sculptors at work today. It is rather a description of the prevailing atmosphere – one which might prevail eventually over talent. For talent does not grow like a lonely plant; the history of the arts indicates that art and thought flourish in a community and atmosphere favorable to their emergence and development.

As I have said, not everything in a culture is tightly connected to everything else. But there are parallels and links. To some extent, the academy, with its esoteric, often incomprehensible theories, is cut off not only from popular opinion but from most practicing writers and painters. Yet there is an astonishing resemblance between the bashing of

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the canon and the questioning of tradition in the university and the widespread dismissal of authority in the media and in the population as a whole. To be sure, students are taught these days to nurture and to flaunt their own opinions – before acquiring the knowledge to sustain them. But this contempt for the past and for authority also is found among people, particularly the young, who have had very little schooling. Perhaps this coincidence is an instance of the merging of the revolt against tradition and authority with native anti-intellectualism and myths of self-reliance, going back to the frontier and articulated early in New England culture by Emerson and others. A large example of the same phenomenon is the breakdown of education in this country, the cause of which is not sufficiently acknowledged. Putting the blame on inadequate funding, as is done by politicians and by many educators, and on the quality of teaching, tends to conceal the actual disrespect for learning and the subjection of the schools to the egalitarian myth. It also ignores the problems of mass education.

The relativism promoted in the university also is paralleled in popular opinion by the common isolationist feeling that what happens in other countries – Cuba, for example – is none of our business. It is not uncommon to hear that they have their politics and their values, and we have ours. And the arguments in the academy against the so-called ethnocentrism of the West is echoed in the pervasive, one-sided criticism of America and the West and the inflation of the values of what has become known as the third world. But one of the chief sources of the current erosion of distinctions, and the pervasive populism and relativism, is the homogenization of the culture, which had formerly been divided into the serious and the popular.

At some point we should ask what are the sources and causes of what appears to be a profound cultural change – though an explanation would not necessarily be a justification. Actually, however, there seems to be some continuity between the modernist and post-modernist temper. In many cases there is an extension of extremist postures, sometimes to a *reductio ad absurdum* of these postures. On the whole, however, it would seem that what we are witnessing today is individualism run wild – perhaps, to change the metaphor, to its logical conclusion. My own speculative view is that, on the popular level, an economic free market is accompanied ultimately by – and has no control over – a cultural free market. Such is the phenomenon we are beginning to see in the liberated countries of Central Europe, where already there are questions about the growth of a commercialized popular culture. They, too, are concerned over the possible lowering of standards and values to the point where anything novel, particularly if it flies in the face of tradition, is celebrated. As we have seen, the craving for novelty produces an atmosphere in

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which the new new constantly trumps the new.

In the intellectual sphere we can see more concrete influences. A few literary and social critics have observed that a good part of the present theoretical mood can be traced to Nietzsche and Heidegger, filtered through the writings of Derrida. This line of descent has been documented most notably by Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, the brilliant French philosophers, in their book on Heidegger, and by Mark Lilla, a young American philosopher, in a masterful piece in a recent issue of *Commentary*. I, myself, though not highly trained in philosophic history, am persuaded that Derrida, who has fathered much of American deconstructionist theory, inherited Nietzsche's nihilism and deep-seated skepticism, and Heidegger's rereading of Western thought as well as his rejetion of liberal humanism, and his turning his back on the modern Western world. According to Ferry and Renaut, Heidegger, despite his own conservatism, provided a philosophical alternative to French existentialism (Heidegger was, to be sure, a seminal existentialist) and orthodox Marxism for the left in France and America. Of course, many strands came together in the formation of postmodern academic theory. We can discern the influence of Foucault's questioning of social relations and meanings – Foucault was, himself, influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Marx – and the Marxist strain that purports to undercut and debunk the bourgeois past. In the hands of the deconstructionists these strands were fused into an overloaded project of determined "demystification" and "demythologization."

Now, in my summary - perhaps too summary – of the culture of what for convenience is called postmodernism, my intention was to be descriptive rather than critical. But I seem to have been unable to keep my own biases out of the picture. Still, aside from the issue of fairness – and I do not want to go into the problem of value-free judgements – the question for those of us who make cultural judgements is whether these large shifts in our thinking are to be welcomed or deplored. Some social and intellectual critics believe that our culture is in a state of crisis. (I take it that a crisis would be defined as a situation in which things are not working, or in intellectual matters specifically as a state of thinking full of contradictions and confusions.) Many writers and artists express their criticism with their feet, so to speak: they simply walk away from the new theories and pursue their professions as though traditional assumptions are still to be respected.

Allan Bloom is the most publicized critic of the effect of the new cultural trends on the university. Many of Bloom's strictures are uncomfortably apt, but, unfortunately, his book is marred by a naive nostalgia for a nonexistent academic paradise. And, as Sidney Hook pointed out, he has oversimplified many literary and philosophical ques-

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tions. Recently, *Tenured Radicals*, a book by Roger Kimball, gave a blistering account of the effect of the latest liberating theories, with many amusing and shocking examples. But the defenders of the new movements have argued that the attacks on them have been highly selective and have been basically defenses of an unacceptable status quo. Louis Menand, for example, in a review of Kimball's book in *The New Republic*, wrote that Kimball cited only the most extreme cases of political distortions of intellectual issues. Besides, Menand added, Kimball's instances do not prove much because everyone knows that colleges institutionalize mediocrity. As Orwell said, the academy specializes in its own brand of nonsense.

There is much to be said for Menand's own cynical and harmless picture of the academy, which amounts to not taking it seriously, but the fact is that the new theoreticians have a prominent place in the life of the university, particularly in some of the more elite institutions. They constitute an articulate and aggressive community: they control a number of professional publications: they run departments and institutes that have an enormous ideological impact on the life of their universities. They bully their colleagues, and they overpower their students, who, I am told by a friend at a major university, are all agog for "theory." The new theorists conduct a vast enterprise. David Lodge, in his new book of essays, *After Bakhtin*, refers to the activity of "the academic critic in America" as "a kind of business." "Top-ranking critics," says Lodge, "are like the more independent film stars or sports stars: they attract fans, they improve their earnings by transferring or threatening to transfer their services to other employers. . . ."

Why should this academic turn be seen as having a deleterious cultural effect? Why not see it as a wrong turn, as an essentially harmless one, from which the academy will find its way out? Why not separate its insights and contributions from its circular theories and its heavy jargon, as we would with any new ideas? The problem, as I see it, is that the current trends are too heavily entrenched and have a questionable effect on the entire culture. As I have indicated, the various components of the new theory mesh into a single movement, weighted politically in a leftist direction. But if we consider each component singly, its influence becomes more visible. Deconstruction has provided the rationale for the other movements in its dismissal of the idea of tradition. But in its own right deconstruction has made of literature an accessory to literary theory, and it has almost edged out standard literary criticism in the academy that is unencumbered by heavy theory. As for its corrosive effect on the so-called canon, it is not true, as some of its acolytes claim, that it has merely updated the classical tradition. The deconstructionists, and those under their influence, have undercut the very concept of a tradition

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by denying any basis for what they call "privileged" critical judgments. By positing a variable text – not endlessly variable, they claim, but its limits are not clear – and the primacy of the reader, deconstructionists sanction the choice of any work over any other. Stanley Fish attempted to rectify the confusion created by the failure to distinguish competent from incompetent readers and the consequent anarchy of opinion by speaking of a community of critical readers whose interpretations and judgments presumably would be normative. But this amounts to little more than a restatement of traditional critical thinking, and it actually contradicts the premises of the entire deconstructionist enterprise. The leading theoreticians do insist that deconstruction is not a method or a system; but in practice, particularly in the hands of the lesser figures, it acts to usurp all other methods and approaches. And what must be the effect on students? Most of them probably cannot grasp the new theory, but, on the other hand, they are denied a more traditional education, which would teach them to understand and evaluate works of literature in a more modest and organic manner. Above all, they acquire a false idea of tradition.They learn that tradition is the arbitrary and authoritarian scheme imposed by interested groups in the West, rather than a continuum of works by writers and literary critics who are indebted to their predecessors, and that, as T. S. Eliot wrote in his famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," every writer has the literary past in his bones.

Feminist literary theory presents a more delicate problem. I cannot go into the intricacies of what has become a vast enterprise, with many different conceptions of literary history, and of the role of gender in writing and reading. I should like to point out merely that feminist theory has travelled a long way from its original intention of exposing and correcting the discrimination against women in all social and professional activities. Recently, literary feminism has moved in the direction of dismissing the Western tradition as white and male-oriented, and of introducing works more congenial to presumable feminist interests. As a result, as Helen Vendler argues in a recent piece in *The New York Review of Books*, this bias has led to a misreading of texts and to a distortion of literary history. In addition, such an approach results in a substitution of content for the impact of an entire work as a mode of literary judgment. In this respect, much feminist theory shares a number of the assumptions of the deconstructionists. And like deconstruction, feminist theory has become a major academic activity. Admittedly, in the hands of the more sophisticated practitioners, feminist criticism has yielded many literary insights, but here I am concerned with its assumptions.

Similarly, black literary studies tend to write off accepted traditions as white in origin and meaning, and in practice substitute what are

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essentially political criteria for esthetic criteria. To be sure, black theoreticians, like the feminists, contend that these esthetic criteria themselves conceal political and gender interests. But that is simply another way of saying that Western art, poetry, fiction, criticism, and philosophy are nothing but the projection of the white, male mind and psyche. How does one reply to the reduction of the enormous complexity and boundless genius of Western art and thought? Some statements are beyond refutation: they simply deny everything we know. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the most successful and most sought-after black theorist, who has been trained in postmodern literary theory, does not go in for crude dismissals of the past, but he does implicitly question traditional values by creating a new canon of black writing. So far as I can see, Gates takes for granted the stature of works by blacks mainly if not entirely by virtue of their blackness.

On the whole, it is difficult to estimate the sway of postmodernist culture. Certainly, as I have suggested, a number of literary and art critics, and most writers, have not been recruited. And there are critical voices in the academy that have not been silenced.

The academic variety of postmodernism, mainly in the form of deconstruction, with a mixture of Marxism and feminism, has been succinctly described by two leading literary critics, Roger Shattuck and Denis Donoghue. Roger Shattuck, in a piece entitled "How to Rescue Literature," published in *The New York Review of Books*, says of the new theories:

> The slippery doctrine of *écriture* . . . has delivered literature into the hands of linguistics and set out to eliminate the author in favor of language itself . . . Reader response theory tends to look around and beyond the text to the reactions it elicits . . . When combined with the thought of Marx or Freud, or Lévi-Strauss or Lacan . . . this position incinerates the whole humanistic tradition of persons and scatters the ashes across a landscape of language, myth, the unconscious, and other collective entities . . . Semiotics "breaks" or "cracks" the literary work like a code to produce not so much a set of interrelated meanings . . . as a protracted commentary on the infinite possibilities of meaning.

Donoghue, in his essay, "Deconstructing Criticism," which also appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, is scathing:

> Deconstructive readings are written mostly for the sake of the theory they are supposed to endorse . . . the essay is sent off to *Diacritics* or *Glyph* or *Semiotexte*. Further: nothing I have read in deconstructive criticism is likely to suppress the common desire of readers to believe

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> that in reading a poem they are listening to someone saying something about something . . . Deconstruction appeals to students who like to feel themselves . . . liberated from the tedious requirement of meaning as such, the official obligation to suppose that words mean something finite rather than everything or nothing . . . And there is the politics of Deconstruction; like Structuralism, it is anti-bourgeois . . . Whatever the case may be, Deconstruction seems to be an instance of 'serious folly' [Shelley].

If we think of the proliferation of postmodernism as a whole, it is not easy – and may be impossible – to stem a cultural tide, particularly one that is being propelled by so many powerful historic forces. One of the lessons of cultural history is that a tide cannot be reversed, particularly by criticism totally from the outside. So far, it would appear that attempts to change the direction of our thinking by critics who have a totally different perspective, and are not themselves engaged in the process of the arts and in critical discourse, do keep alternative ways of thinking alive. But they have little basic effect on the course of postmodernist culture. My own outlook, I am sorry to say, is not too optimistic. What can be done, it seems to me, is limited to the pursuit of one's professional work – in fiction, poetry, criticism, and other disciplines – in keeping with one's own values, but within, so far as possible, the arena of creative and critical activity, inside the academy as well as outside it.

If there is any historic reason for not accepting the inevitability of postmodernism, it is that intellectual fashions, particularly in this country, do not last, and, at bottom, postmodernism in the academy is an intellectual fashion, a bandwagon. In the arena of popular art and opinion, however, we may be entering a new phase in Western culture, one not entirely foreseeable, and, as usual in these matters, America seems to be leading the way. If, however, we are looking, not for a return to the past but for some restoration of traditional values and distinctions, would it be too farfetched to expect that the uprising in Central Europe against oppressive movements that parade under the banner of revolution may lead us similarly to question those postmodernist theories that present themselves as radical and liberating? It would certainly be one of the great historic ironies if the countries that have just freed themselves from Communist rule were to set an intellectual example for us.

Morris Dickstein: Instead of enumerating points of agreement and disagreement which surely will come out in the discussion, I thought I would comment on William Phillips's paper by making a parallel comment on the situation he describes.

I begin by taking note of a certain irony in the topic of this con-

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ference: Think back to 1960 and try to imagine *Partisan Review* organizing a conference on "The Changing Culture of the University." At the time the magazine had never been associated with any university, and many of its contributors would have regarded the topic as a contradiction in terms. They would have insisted that our real cultural life lay outside the academic world, in the creative work of independent artists and intellectuals. There would have been no humanities endowment to provide public funds for such a gathering, just as there was no arts endowment offering grants to controversial artists. Left alone, with no one even tempting them to sell out, humanists and artists alike could remain virtuously poor.

Only a few years later *Partisan Review* would find itself housed uneasily at a large university – not this one! – and one of its best-known critics, Lionel Trilling, would write sardonically that "between the university and reality there now exists the happiest, most intimate relation. Nothing in life is so mundane and practical or so rarefied and strange that the university will not take it into sympathetic consideration." Yet Trilling also noted with disquiet that the art and ideas that were now being drawn into the university had a strong oppositional, even apocalyptic character. They had emerged from an "adversary culture" influenced by modernism and Marxism, by Freud and Nietzsche, indeed, by all the antinomian strains in art that went back to surrealism and romanticism.

The alarm sounded by William Phillips in his opening paper issues from a deeply pessimistic response to the later stages of this adversary culture, with its institutionalized radicalism, its insular, self-perpetuating guild strategies, and the jargon of its rarefied methodologies, as transmitted to an otherwise gifted segment of the younger generation. He tells us that the sense of tradition has been thoroughly undermined, that deconstruction "has made of literature an accessory to literary theory" and "acts to usurp all other methods and approaches," that the "tide cannot be reversed, particularly by criticism totally from the outside," and concludes by wondering if the best that we can do is to cultivate our garden, to pursue "one's professional work . . . in keeping with one's own values."

Whether or not Phillips's pessimism is justified, there's much in his indictment that rings true. He focuses on the dramatic transformation of literature departments into outposts of poststructuralist theory. Though literary theorists differ significantly on key issues, they share assumptions reflected in the work of beleaguered young assistant professors and graduate students desperate to find a foothold in the job market. Recent theory focuses on race, class, and gender as socially constructed categories of "difference," often used as a basis of exclusion and exploitation. This

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body of theory follows deconstruction in placing great emphasis on the duplicities of language and representation: its distrust of referentiality often leaves 'reality' and 'truth' between inverted commas. It views art as an expression of ideology – the instrument of social power and persuasion, a way of indoctrinating people and keeping them in their place. And finally it exhibits an anticanonical fascination with popular culture, with excluded writers and neglected genres. In American Studies, for example, this has led to a shift away from the classic writers and towards a multiculturalism centering on blacks, native Americans, working-class immigrants, women, gays, and other outsiders, whose own writings are filtered through a recondite theoretical vocabulary.

The explosion of theory and cultural studies at the expense of traditional literary commentary has astounded many observers. Seen from the outside, this corner of the academic world, with its new generational style, looks like a gigantic web of conformity and obfuscation. Satirical articles in mainstream publications have begun focusing on the MLA extravaganza and the tyranny of "politically correct" thinking, with its seeming intolerance of dissent. Neoconservatives rail even more strongly against what they see as the political agenda behind the literary issues, while humanists object to the "hermeneutics of suspicion" that makes the critic the Nietzschean unmasker exposing the assumptions of the artist and his culture. These traditionalists still worship at the shrine of art and philosophy, discuss great books as if they dealt with a recognizable world, and seek to address the elusive common reader. Theorists respond that this older dispensation, which stressed individual genius and aesthetics but ignored the social matrix of art, was just as political and just as conforming, for all its incidental variety.

Let me contribute a personal note to this debate. As an undergraduate English major in the late 1950s, I took as a model Cleanth Brooks's famous collection of essays, *The Well Wrought Urn*, with its close, often paradoxical readings of classic English poems. The book taught me to read poetry in a more complex way than I had dreamed possible. I didn't think of it as a tool for dashing off bright papers, and I certainly wasn't consciously looking for irony, paradox, and ambiguity in the poems I loved. They were simply the way many of us learned to read. On the other hand, I also came under the influence of *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*, which offered vivid examples of cultural-political criticism, addressed to a wider audience, as an alternative to the formal approach. Trying to reconcile the two, Alfred Kazin probably spoke for most *Partisan Review* critics when he wrote, "I have never been able to understand why the study of literature in relation to society should be divorced from a full devotion to what literature is in itself."

For the young critic or radical historian of 1990, race, class, and

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gender are what paradox, irony, and ambiguity had finally become in 1960: a pedagogic formula based on ideas that had been fresh, even ground-breaking, two decades earlier. The academic heyday of the New Criticism, with its emphasis on close reading, came in the 1950s, but the pioneering work had been done by quirky, unsystematic critics like Eliot, Richards, Empson, Leavis, Winters, Burke, and Blackmur in the twenties and thirties. But as late as 1943, Brooks could say that the New Critics "have next to no influence in the universities." This would change dramatically in the postwar decade.

The time lag involved in the reduction of new ideas to professional routine, or a teachable "method," helps explain how the radical slogans and breakthroughs of the sixties became the orthodoxy of the eighties, when academics, disgusted by the shameless money-culture of the Reagan years, looked for ways to resist the conservative tide. But it was disturbing to see them taking literature as a target for affirmative action, or turning noble goals – social justice, equality, personal freedom – into blatant careerism. Too often, their radicalism was no more than an arcane jargon that had little connection to politics or people. As their views were institutionalized, some who once dreamed of changing the world now settled for a piece of academic turf.

So it's tempting to say that the journal articles on James Bond novels and masturbation and the MLA sessions in postcolonial discourse theory are simply the current way of being academic, as New Criticism was in 1960, historical scholarship in 1930, philology in 1910, all prosecuted with the same pseudoscientific aura. If this is true, then we can also see these exotic new flora as harmless rituals of professional accreditation, which enable younger scholars to secure tenure and older ones to shore up their prestige or at least remain in the conversation. This might explain the astonishing conversion of some conventional scholars to a rhetoric they surely never dreamed of using, to a radicalism that has nothing to do with who they are or how they live.

In this kind of work, whole systems of thought are jumbled together with breathless abandon, losing their anchor in the real world. We can find the totemic traces of a Freud who knew nothing of illness or therapy, a Marx who never pored over the Victorian blue-books or explored the working day, a Foucault who theorized about power but had never studied the history of the prison or the asylum. In this altogether remote academic realm, we can find feminist theory so rarefied that it ignores the problems of actual women, and Marxist rhetoric impervious to the failures of existing socialist systems. To attack these would-be theorists for their politics, as neoconservatives do, is to box with shadows, for such academicism is really a wholesale retreat from politics into abstractions.

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Even amid the din it's worth recalling that every facet of current theory not only attracted brilliant, provocative minds but also began with some sharp insight. Few critics today would call themselves strict deconstructionists. Yet deconstruction, for all its insistence on the cul-de-sac of language, at least reminded us of how slippery and subjective the act of interpretation could be. The rise of cultural studies, including Women's Studies, African American Studies, and the new historicism, was a direct reaction to the dead-end skepticism of deconstruction. It restored the sense of social reference that deconstruction had effectively banished from criticism. It unwittingly revived the historicism that predated the New Critics. It reclaimed popular culture from the obtuse polemics of mass-culture theorists of the 1950s. It rescued forgotten writers and changed our angle of vision on many familiar works. Zora Neale Hurston is an example of a missing writer whose strengths were illuminated by a criticism that focused on race and gender, just as John Donne had been rediscovered, perhaps even overpraised, by a criticism focused on metaphor, paradox, and ambiguity. In each case critics followed a path already charted by new writers – black women novelists, modernist poets – who were inventing their own ancestors.

Like the New Criticism, cultural studies quickly ran to excess. The old fetishism of the text, centering on the ambiguities of language, was succeeded by a fetishism of the context, which showed how everything in the work was culturally determined. Criticism as literary judgment gave way to criticism as cultural history, and minor works were promoted for their exemplary content, or because they fit into some critical argument, or because of their impact in their own time. (This too was typical of older academic scholarship, which subdued literature into a documentation of society.) Meanwhile, far greater works were warily examined for their concealed ideological freight. Little credit was given to the variety and complexity of the Western tradition, with its internal dissonances and subtexts. Yet Western skepticism and pluralism, its traditions of free expression, had nurtured the dissenting views of these same critics, and had in fact produced a strong line of cultural criticism that stretched back to Rousseau, Carlyle, Ruskin, Tocqueville, and Marx.

Both the contributions and the distortions of the new academic radicals have come to a head on the question of the canon. No one can disagree that good books by African Americans and women should be added to the curriculum along with accessible works from non-Western cultures. Simple justice, a changing world, and the increasing diversity of the student body all make this inevitable. But it scarcely follows that we should traduce and simplify the books many of us grew up on.

There's a curious symmetry between radicals and conservatives on this vexed issue of the 'canon' which is itself a misplaced metaphor from

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the history of institutional religions. Conservatives argue that the Great Books are a repository of timeless moral and social truths, a bulwark against modern relativism and decadence. Radicals reject those values, deny their universal claims, and see the same books as instruments of hegemony and social control, deeply implicated in Western racism, sexism, and colonialism. Neither side allows much room for the subversiveness, autonomy, and unpredictability of great works of literature, which can be interpreted in different ways precisely because they cannot be reduced to a simple ideological thrust. Having withstood the test of time, great books have usually meant different things to different people, often cutting across the prejudices of their own age. Far from an immutable canon, which is what the conservatives describe, or a manipulated canon, as the radicals see it, we've had an endlessly changing canon of protean works constantly reinterpreted in the light of contemporary ideas and new writing.

The rise of the university to a position of unchallenged cultural power enabled professors to suppose that by reshaping the syllabus they could alter the literary tradition. Once the culture of criticism became largely an academic culture, professors imagined that what they chose to teach and to discuss in scholarly journals is what genuinely determined literary value. This kind of myopic self-importance confuses the canon with the curriculum. Revisionists, seeking self-validation while eulogizing "difference," see the literature of the past as a terrain of battle – in other words, as a projection of academic politics, with its turf wars, patronage, and jockeying for position and power.

Yet conservatives too are wrong: the literary canon has changed from generation to generation. This could be demonstrated in many recent cases, such as the fall and rise of Dickens's reputation, or Shelley's, or Edmund Wilson's. Most writers who survive will wax and wane from one era to another; Shakespeare has been a different writer in each of the last four centuries; Robert Frost is a striking example of a poet who has served different needs in different decades. But these changes are in response not to the dictates of critics or political maneuvers but to the historical and cultural factors that influence everyone. The critics who influence our sense of the past are those most in tune with what the best new writers are doing. (Otherwise we have theory in search of a body of literature that will justify it.)

The major example of such a canonical shift in the twentieth century took place with the rise of modernism. The poetry of Eliot, supported by his criticism, helped make the forgotten poems of Donne and the long-unpublished poems of Hopkins truly legible in modern terms. Something similar happened in America with the rediscovery of Melville and the canonization of Emily Dickinson. Later, the new sensibility of

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the 1960s led to a revival of romanticism. Suddenly, thanks to the deep needs of the moment, poets like Wordsworth and Whitman became intrinsically more interesting and 'relevant' to readers than Donne and Crashaw. The vital new criticism of these neglected writers came after the fact.

Today many black and women writers, along with some non-Western writers, have become powerfully relevant in similar ways. Their concerns have become a central part of the contemporary agenda, but their immediacy depends on their literary power, not their political uses. A focus on race or gender may make some writers more available to us, but this does not in itself make them worth reading. The strength and intrinsic interest of their themes doesn't free us from the obligations of critical judgment, nor does their long-overdue inclusion in the curriculum demand the banishment of more traditional writers whose work still moves us.

This continuous exchange between tradition and the new is very much in the spirit of the high modernism and independent radicalism that inspired *Partisan Review*. When Trilling first expressed his concerns about the merger between the university and the wider culture, he wrote neither as a partisan of the avant-garde nor as a professor, but as someone devoted to both the autonomy of the university and the hard freedom of cultural creation. He knew how the university as a pedagogic institution could distort the arts and flatten criticism, and how the exigent, apocalyptic character of modern art (and politics) could wreak havoc with the fragile ecology of the university.

Recent developments in the culture of the university have borne out his fears, creating a tame, routinized charade of academic radicalism, accompanied by a venomous conservative reaction that caricatures the very tradition it defends.

Isn't it time for disgruntled liberals to speak up?

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Jean Elshtain.

Jean Elshtain: A plane was flying over the Rockies. It had been circling for several hours and the passengers were growing restless. Finally the pilot came on and announced, in a cheery, reassuring voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is we're two hours ahead of schedule. The bad news is we're lost." That, I believe, is an apt characterization of American culture of the twentieth century. We're going farther and farther, but we are bereft of a sense of direction.

In the current cultural atmosphere, is there any longer any room for a reflective appreciation of tradition, for humility in the face of life's

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mysteries, for self-responsible freedom, the very basis of democratic citizenship? These are the matters I will explore in response to Mr. Phillips's essay. As the political theory interloper on this panel, I am going to take up Mr. Phillips's invitation to discuss the wider culture in which the contemporary university is nested. Mr. Phillips argues that the confusions and celebrations of postmodernism, spearheaded by a band of highly politicized academics and theorists, now abound in the general culture. Thus we confront, he insists, a hypertheorized cohort whose members act as gatekeepers within the academy as well as in the world of many journals and professional associations. Their cast of mind veers towards nihilism or at least towards a cynical insistence that nothing can ever really be known and everything finally comes down to power.

I share a number of Mr. Phillips's concerns. That extreme forms of deconstructive critique disempower readers seems to me undeniably true. If the only way to approach a text is in and through a recondite theory, then the ordinary reader is denied access to the text. That this world of specialists is giddily self-referential is also true. It is a veritable lovefest out there in certain circles. That an absolutist postmodernism overpoliticizes thought is often the case. (This does not make it 'radical'; indeed, much deconstruction lacks any critical purchase on the social and economic questions facing contemporary society.)

Having noted these points of shared concern, let me move to Mr. Phillips's conviction that there are manifestations of the postmodernist temperament in the culture as a whole. One mark, he insists, is a widespread dismissal of authority in contemporary America, a world in which the new always trumps the old and the "new new " the merely new. There are political fallouts to the changing cultural climate. What I find to be the case, however, is not so much the extension of deconstructive enthusiasms into the wider culture, as the aggressive operation of a cluster of Enlightenment presumptions in an applied form that, for the most part, escape serious critique save by religious thinkers, a small handful of political critics, and a few ecological feminists. Let me explain what I have in mind.

Ordinary people, if I may stick with that murky category, have long been pummeled and prevailed upon by social engineers, managers, and promulgators of programs of all sorts who represent the invasion of scientistic presumptions into every aspect of human life: biological, educational, environmental, social, economic, and so on. My specific example of this phenomenon is a project I call the New Eugenics. Here one finds the coming together of a second strand of feminist politics, the hubristic human-nature-changing version; applied science at its most arrogant, and the enthrallment of our culture with the authority of science as the third element in a powerful triangle. Consider this quote from a

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feminist theorist, Alison M. Jagger, in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature:*

> We must remember that the ultimate transformation of human nature at which socialist feminists aim goes beyond the liberal conception of psychological androgyny to a possible transformation of physical human capacities, some of which until now have been seen as biologically limited to one sex. This transformation might even include the capacities for insemination, for lactation, and for gestation so that, for instance, one woman could inseminate another, so that men and non-parturative women could lactate, and so that fertilized ova could be transplanted into women's or even men's bodies. These developments may seem farfetched, but in fact they are already on the technological horizon.... We are not only oppressed as women, we are oppressed by having to be women, or men, as the case may be.

An article from the front page of *The New York Times* on October 25, 1990: "Menopause Is Found No Bar to Pregnancy," began, "In a remarkable advance researchers have shown that older women who have gone through menopause can easily become pregnant using donated eggs," thus signalling the way *The Times* means for us to treat this development. One of the subtitles in the article is: "Hope for Fifty-Year-Olds, " in which a doctor is quoted as saying, "So long as a woman is in good health, there's no reason why she shouldn't be able to go through this. " What *The Times* labels a remarkable advance may make many people queasy but the authority of science – if not *The New York Times* – is such that they feel they have no grounds on which to lodge an objection.

As well, if someone *chooses* it, we cannot argue against it, even if what is chosen is, to take another example, abortion because and *only* because the unborn child is the wrong gender. To 'name' this as a form of biologistic racism is to risk being labelled "anti-choice. " To this must be added the vaunted sanctity of contract. One astonishing feature in the famous, or infamous, surrogate mothering case of several years ago is that a majority of the public, when polled, argued that the biological mother had no claims to any connection to the child to which she had given birth because she had, after all, signed a contract. In these matters we cannot count on the good sense of ordinary Americans to save us, because they too have been traduced by the deformations of a culturally-sanctioned ultra-individualism, especially where it is coupled with "remarkable " scientific progress.

The project I am here criticizing embodies, in vulgarized form, the technological application of disengaged reason, one form of reason we have inherited from the Enlightenment which in our day takes scientistic

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forms. The quest for intrusive intervention in human reproduction comes from those able to command the resources of the genetic engineers, the medical reproduction experts, the new eugenicists. In this way human creation is transformed into a technical operation. In the long run this promotes a project Oliver O'Donovan calls scientific self-transcendence. In our culture *curiositas* has become a "sin of the masses. "

There are feminists troubled at the Frankenstein monster we seem to have unleashed and that other feminists endorse. But caught within the framework of a romantic expressivist alternative to disengaged reason, their grounds for dismissal are often ethically and epistemologically very weak. That is one prong to our current crisis of cultural identity. A second is on the level of the rhetoric of public life and policy.

Our political discourse is increasingly dominated by a doctrine of rights absolutism. As Fred Siegel has argued, a judicialized politics of rights bypasses public consent and poses politics as a series of winner-take-all outcomes. The abortion debate is perhaps the starkest example. Rights absolutism evades issues of responsibility and encourages a polarized, single-issue politics. Despite the fact that public opinion polls indicate that the vast majority of Americans favor some rough-and-ready association of rights with responsibilities, the judicially driven politics of recent decades insulates proponents of rights absolutism from the give-and-take of political compromise, as well as from consideration of the growing social costs of a legal doctrine presupposing and sustaining a view of the untrammeled self.

I know what happens at this point. The doctrinaire rights absolutist, whose view combines strong libertarianism with calls for more government intervention in all spheres of life, so long as it fits his agenda, will see in my argument little but nostalgia, reaction, fainthearted traditionalism. The doctrinaire defender of the market, who manages to embrace a strong community-oriented ethos with calls for the free reign of market initiatives, will see in my concerns little more than the remnants of a disillusioned leftism. Our terms of political debate have so congealed we find it nearly impossible to think in new ways.

Let me attempt to reframe this just a bit. An authentic political hope is that we might yet perform a rescue operation that preserves the best about American society – its generosity, its sense of spontaneous concern for others, its volatile mingling of rootedness with individual freedom. In his book, *Whose Keeper?*, Alan Wolff speaks directly to our discontents. For all our success in modern societies, especially in the United States, there is a sense that all is not well; that something has gone terribly awry. And I think that sense is what Mr. Phillips reflects in his paper.

We citizens of liberal democratic societies rightly cherish our free-

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dom, but we are confused when it comes to recognizing the social obligations that make freedom possible in the first place, Wolff argues. The political fallout of our moral crisis is reflected in the irony of a morally exhausted left embracing rather than challenging the logic of the market by endorsing the relentless translation of wants into rights. On the other hand, many conservatives love the untrammeled, or the less trammelled the better, operations of the market in economic life, but call for a restoration of traditional morality, including strict sexual scripts for men and women in social life.

Both these logics are doomed to self-destruct because they rely either on the market or the state to "organize their codes of moral obligation " when what we really need is "civil society, families, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, volunteerism, spontaneous groups and movements not to reject but to complete the project of modernity. " This project of modernity is at odds with facile celebrations of 'community' as any group of somewhat like-minded persons who happen to be in one room together at a given point in time and, as well, with calls for a return to a romanticized organic community. The crisis of late modernity, American-style, is an ethical crisis. It cannot be solved through managerial expertise. We require a perspective on moral agency grounded in a revivification of the theory and practice of civil society. Genuine freedom is protected only if strong intimate and societal relations flourish. Obligations to others, including future generations, begin as clusters of obligations to particular others in our immediate environment.

Mr. Phillips concludes by suggesting that it would be a great historic irony "if the countries that have just freed themselves from Communist rule were to have set an example for us. " Yes, it would be a great and wonderful irony, but it is, I believe, one we should embrace. To my mind, the writer who has most eloquently expressed a political hope that speaks directly to our discontents is Czechoslovakia's playwright president, Vàclav Havel, himself a modernist in his art and a transcendental phenomenologist in his philosophy. A student of the great Czech philosopher, Jan Patocka, who was indebted to Heidegger, Havel uses the best impulses of Heideggerian thought to good purpose. I would like to end with some wonderful "words on words " by Vàclav Havel:

> It is not hard to demonstrate that all the main threats confronting the world today, from atomic war and ecological disaster to social and civilizational catastrophe – have hidden within them just one root cause, the imperceptible transformation of what was originally a humble message into an arrogant one. Arrogantly man started to be-

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> lieve that as the pinnacle and lord of creation he had a total understanding of nature and could do what he liked with it. Arrogantly he started to think that as the possessor of reason he was capable of understanding totally his own history and therefore of planning a life of happiness for all. This gave him the right, in the name of an ostensibly better future for all – to which he had found the one and only key – to sweep from his path all those who did not fall for his plan. Arrogantly he started to think that since he was capable of splitting the atom he was now so perfect that there was no longer any danger of nuclear arms rivalry let alone nuclear war. In all those cases he was fatally mistaken, that is bad, but in each case he is already beginning to realize his mistake and that is good.

That is the moment of hope that we must share if we are to do politics, a humble yet nonetheless, realizable hope. In the dark days of the civil war Abraham Lincoln insisted that the time had come to think and act anew, to disenthrall ourselves. Uncompromising deconstruction does not represent that disenthrallment from tired ways of thinking, for it indulges in a celebratory embrace of much of what is impoverishing our souls, including an excessively disassociated approach to life and thought; a rampant individualism that feeds into a winner-takes-all politics of rights absolutism; and insouciance at best, often coupled with open disdain, for serious attempts to construct an ethico-politics given the reigning assumption that power and compulsion is all there is. For authentic hope we must look to other sources and other moral teachers.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much, Jean Elshtain. William Phillips, would you like to respond?

William Phillips: Some very brief comments, so we can have comments from the audience. About what Morris Dickstein said: I don't see any particular usefulness in going into the past of the New York intellectuals and the *Partisan Review* community in order to point out that some of us, many of us, have changed. I don't see what's gained by pointing to the absolute truism that people change. We're concerned with what we believe now, not with what we believed then – unless that's a polemical device against what people believe now by pointing out that they believed something else in the past. Also, Morris Dickstein said that we should add works by blacks, women, other minority groups (I don't know why women are always included in minority groups, but apparently that seems to be the custom) or third-world writers, just to make our curricula more representative. I would argue on the other hand that we should include writers who are good and important and add to what we consider to be a live tradition. I think he made a good

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point when he said that there's a difference between the curriculum and the tradition, that there's some kind of academic arrogance. I just read a book by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who teaches at Duke, in which she seems to believe that literary and intellectual tradition, going all the way back to Aristotle or Thucydides or Sophocles, has been created by academics. Now, it's hard to believe that a professor at a recognized university can teach this to students. This is sheer misrepresentation.

About Jean Elshtain's paper I have only this to say: she said something about women and men feeling oppressed because of the fact that they're women and men. I find that a rather odd observation. It seems to me that one of the triumphant aspects of our civilization is the distinction between men and women. And I don't think women should be oppressed because they're women or men should be oppressed because they're men. It just doesn't make any sense to me.

Jean Bethke Elshtain: That wasn't my observation. I was quoting someone.

William Phillips: But you didn't quote it critically.

Jean Bethke Elshtain: Oh, but I did.

William Phillips: Oh, you did? Then I misunderstood. I take it back then. I apologize.

Jean Bethke Elshtain: All right.

William Phillips: And also, when she talks about the new technology by which men might become pregnant, do I talk for every man here when I say that I have no desire to become pregnant? I don't see anything to be gained by it. And it seems to me that we have more important problems that face our civilization than to discover a method of impregnating men. That's all I want to say.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. I'll moderate now. Please raise your hands and announce your names, and then go to one of the microphones on either side of the hall, because we are recording everything. Who would like to go first?

Jean Bethke Elshtain: I just wanted to clarify, Mr. Phillips, I think you're quite right. We have many serious problems that we face as a society. But one of the problems we face is our continued romance or love affair with the authority of society when the advances it's

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promulgating are characterized as progress. It's very different for Americans to find a language in and through which to counter certain tendencies, even when what's up is a project that seeks actual reconstitution of the human body. That was the point I was making. So in this case, your worry about the loss of authority can be reversed; that is, we are not sufficiently skeptical about some forms of authority, science, for example, in contemporary American life.

Morris Dickstein: I'd just like to say one or two words about Mr. Phillips's comments on what I said. I'm surprised that he should be annoyed at being reminded of the history of *Partisan Review* on such an unexceptionable point as combining tradition and the new. It seems to me that this is something on which the magazine has been consistent from its earlier days to the present. The other point, of course, about including works by Afro-Americans and women should be clear from the thrust of my whole talk; I said we should do so only to the extent that these works meet literary criteria and to the extent that these works have been unfairly neglected or marginalized in the past. For example, Jane Tompkins has rediscovered and given theoretical reasons for reviving an interest in the popular American sentimental novel of the mid-nineteenth century. And I know many people who, based on her interesting argument about those works, have tried teaching them in courses. What you have to do, they tell me, is to spoon-feed them to students, explaining to them every minute, on virtually every page, why they should be interested in these books, although fundamentally on a naive reading (essentially a true reading) they're not. So that's certainly the kind of special pleading that I'm against. And of course it's the students who get it in the neck when that occurs, because they're really not privy to those professorial agendas.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Ronald Radosh.

Ronald Radosh: I'm an historian, not a literary critic, so I can't even say I've read all the deconstructionist things you've referred to. I have of course read the articles about them in the periodicals and journals we all read. Now, I appreciate what Morris was trying to do. If I got his point correctly, he was trying to create a synthesis or a new middle position, but I think there's a bit of unfairness in which you make the neoconservative critics the mirror image of the radical extremists and call in effect for a new center. The most obvious reason, one that really does horrify me, is the new emphasis on what is called the black esthetic. Now, I recall reading in the past few weeks two very lovely quotes, one Allan Bloom used in an essay (I think it appeared in *Commentary*) where he

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ended the essay quoting W. E. B. Du Bois, and what Du Bois had said (unfortunately I don't have the quote with me) is that he got an understanding of humanity and literature and culture from Shakespeare, not from Negro authors of his time. And Du Bois pointed to the necessity of honoring and learning from the Western tradition. The other quote which I read recently in an essay is a similar one from Ralph Ellison, where Ellison talked about growing up in a Southern town, his reading and learning from great literature. And of all the authors he named, virtually none of them were black. He said that he found it offensive to be told that to be involved in life and culture and politics you had to put "black" authors in the curriculum for purposes of relevance.

Now would you agree this gets to crazy extremes? The most notorious example is the recent one of Henry Louis Gates's testimony in the 2 Live Crew trial. I think we would all agree here, having read the lyrics of 2 Live Crew in the recent *New Republic* editorial attacking Gates, that the defense of their lyrics as art because they're black and because this is a unique new black esthetic is virtually insane. It's abominable. And this filters down. I've had black students come into my office this week complaining about something or other, saying you're white and this material you're giving me doesn't come from a black and therefore it's irrelevant. Now these are freshmen and sophomores. This has filtered down. They hear this thing and come in and say, we can come protest because what we're given isn't from a black source. Isn't it proper to respond as harshly as possible to this kind of new belief that there's a black esthetic or a particular women's esthetic that has to replace things? Certainly, as you say, it must have literary quality. But the replacement of some of the classics by Frantz Fanon, as I think was done at Stanford, is happening. It's not Morris Dickstein who is reforming the curriculum. It's a lot of other people, like Henry Louis Gates.

Morris Dickstein: Let me respond to that briefly. I think that there has been a change in the attitude of what you might call outsider groups toward the Western tradition. For example, when Jews and other immigrants were being included in ever greater numbers in the university in the 1930s and afterwards, what they wanted most was to be included in the Western tradition. They were at the door and were asking to get in. They had been kept out for a long time and wanted more than anything else to assimilate into the Western tradition. For reasons that are probably too complex to understand, for the last twenty or thirty years many black students and intellectuals, unlike Ralph Ellison, have not had the same desire to be included, to be accepted that, for example, Jews had in the 1930s. Instead they've wanted an acknowledgment of the richness and the value of their own cultural sources and traditions. And this takes me

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to the Gates issue. Now I think what Gates did, about which I feel exactly the same way you do, seems to me, however, to be rooted in very complex polemics and divisions within black culture and among black intellectuals. For example, I know from speaking to him that Gates detests Richard Wright, and he more or less has been pursuing a quarrel that goes back to the 1930s, the mutual hatred between Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, taking the side not precisely of black nationalism and a black political program but instead trying to reaffirm the tradition and the value and the sources of black folk culture. (This shift in emphasis from victimization to cultural strength is similar to what happened within the studies of slavery by historians fifteen years ago.) I happen to think this is an extraordinarily misconceived example, and even though 2 Live Crew won their case, Gates got into a fair amount of trouble over it. But one can see it, or try to see it, within the polemics and disagreements that exist within black culture. As far as black nationalism or the black arts movement go, that's really dead. It reached its peak in 1969. At that point Ralph Ellison was a very isolated figure in black culture, but today that has changed very dramatically.

William Phillips: It's just not clear, Morris, whether you're describing what happened or whether you're approving or disapproving of it. That's what I find difficult in some of the things you say.

Morris Dickstein: Well, I said what I thought about Gates.

William Phillips: All right.

Jean Bethke Elshtain: A very brief comment that speaks to the point, in this instance with young women as readers. I have had remarkable moments in some of the classes I teach, including a class on images of women and power. One example is students expressing surprise that a woman writer (in this case Willa Cather) could create a believable male protagonist. They were somehow of the view that women can create believable women and maybe men can do a job with believable men, but in general the writer and the theorist cannot speak outside of his or her own skin. There is a very strange insularity, a retreat into the self, a narrow view of the self. The upshot is that one dares not speak beyond the terms and the framework of oneself. And that has all kinds of spillover into the wider culture. To give just one other brief example of this: a female philosopher told me she was attacked by feminists because the primary object of her scholarly enthusiasm was St. Augustine. She was told, in no uncertain terms, that a woman had no business reading and writing about a person who, after all, had some very strange views. It is

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odd and unfortunate that in the name of feminism this kind of retreat is occurring and that people are not being freed up to roam as they will and to explore as they might.

Lindsay Waters: I just want to make a plea for discrimination in reading, sort of in line with what Morris Dickstein was saying. Is there a group of new camp followers who have simplified theory and feminism and historicism into a set of easily teachable dogmas? Yes, of course. But one's job is to discriminate not to lump. One can't pretend one has come to terms with what one hasn't read, I don't think, by attacking the weak statements of acolytes who are easy to read. I think that people like Paul de Man were making defenses of literature that were very much in line with what Randall Jarrell was doing in the 1950s. And as evidence I'll point you towards Frank Kermode's *Appetite for Poetry*, where in his beautiful prologue he makes the case. He shows how to discriminate between sheep and goats. To talk about Derrida, one has to talk in larger terms: the critique of Hegel following Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger. And this is the great philosophical tradition of which he is a part. One should think about that question. The rejection of the marketplace and of modernism is the weak part of Heidegger, the antibourgeois, antidemocratic thought in Heidegger. Derrida's defense of democracy, which he's been lecturing on, is much more in league with the positive sides of modern culture than anything Mr. Phillips said about him, and more in league with people like Charles Taylor. I'd say the bad stuff is there. There are bad scholars out there writing. But one must discriminate, and this does not relieve one of the task of reading.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Do you want to answer?

William Phillips: Well, if we're being reprimanded for not discriminating enough, may I say that we should discriminate more between Randall Jarrell and Paul de Man. They're at the opposite poles of critical and theoretical activity. It would take me fifteen or twenty minutes to demonstrate that, but it seems to me so obvious that I can't understand why anyone should question it.

Morris Dickstein: Let me say, Lindsay, that I think the subject of this colloquium was meant to be the "culture of the university," which I think requires one to deal more with the acolytes than one would in a symposium on the work of major critics. Many people feel the oppressiveness of these recent critical movements, and this has always been true of such cycles in the past, in what you might call the pedagogical or decadent phase, when things are simplified by being institutionalized. If

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you talked about the work of major critics you could argue that Paul de Man was obviously a great reader of poetry and a brilliant critic, and so on. However, Paul de Man's work took a turn from his early, phenomenologically-oriented work and his work on romanticism towards, in *The Allegories of Reading,* a kind of cul-de-sac of self-referential emphasis on literature as language and language as referring to itself, which seems to me a deterioration of his work - not in brilliance of argument but in the position he took, to me a very sterile one. But one would have to argue that in great detail, and we can't do that here.

Roger Shattuck: I'd like to refer at the start of these three days of wrangling about contemporary culture in the university to a term that all three of you seem to accept. That's the term "postmodernist" or "postmodern." I don't yet know what "modern" is, and even Mr. Phillips expressed some reservations, saying that this was more of a chronological term than a descriptive one. That's exactly the point. I don't think "postmodern" or "postmodernist" tells us anything about where we stand and how we can put some form of description to everything we're talking about. And since we don't know what "modern" is, we don't know what "postmodern" is. I wonder if there is another term we can use? I really don't have one to suggest, except that I've been reading Dostoevsky lately, and when you start thinking about the sequence that connects Turgenev and Chernyshevsky and finally Dostoevsky, and on down to, well, Lenin and Orwell and beyond, I think there might be some reason for our talking descriptively about a limitation. Not all of our contemporary culture is in the university, but a certain strand of that culture is "neonihilist."

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you.

John Grady: I'm from Wheaton College. I would like to refer to Mr. Dickstein's closing remarks, because I'm worried about the situation you're describing in a more anthropological sense. I don't think that these new trends are particularly widespread or particularly influential in the wider culture. This dismays me because I think the university is not as influential in the wider culture as it should be; the effect of these theoretical schools may in fact be a negative one, may stop us from doing what we should be doing. I'm worried about the fact that among colleagues who teach, who discuss the new literatures, the discussion of difference disguises a genuine fear of the Other. In fact, we are conveying this fear to students, rather than confronting, countering, and dealing with the Other. I'm worried about a culture of fear that I think characterizes our relationships. It's a very petty fear. I begin to sense it here as

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theory and what it means about who we are, and so on. This is deeply distressing. I don't care about taking sides. But I wonder how we are stopped from doing what we as teachers should be doing in the wider society and fulfilling our responsibilities. This culture of fear that characterizes our lives in these institutions is puzzling to me. We really need to look into it more.

Shirley Johnson: It takes a lot of courage for an economist to speak at such an erudite meeting. But I want to pick up on what was just said and carry it a little further. I am a faculty member at Vassar College, as well as an Advisory Board member of *Partisan Review*. One of the things that distresses me in the academy is that there seems to be a profound sense of inferiority about what we are about, even an apology for Western civilization. Somehow the Other – the black, the female, the underclass, the third world – is seen as superior. I speak from the vantage point of a woman who has organized and continues to team teach a multidisciplinary course on work and gender and who has spent time trying to make our curriculum more inclusive. But it seems to me that we can't know the Other without knowing that in which we are grounded. We have no way of interpreting unless we view the Other from our own intellectual heritage. Yet those of us who are old enough to remember the Harvard General Education or Columbia Great Books requirements and who want to return to an updated version of those programs are thought to be retrogressive and wrong-headed. It is as if with our new concern with race, class, and gender, we can no longer look at issues through the eyes of Sophocles, Plato's *Republic*, or even Locke and Mill without being thought to have retrogressed into the old, bad, exclusive, white, male, misogynist modes. I think we have not yet come to grips with how to broaden our own cultural base without losing it. Material must be able to be included for its literary, intellectual, philosophical worth in forming and expanding young minds. Today so many in the academy see people in one camp or another. My hope for this conference is that we can manage in the next three days to build bridges and avoid falling into an either/or situation, because in so doing we would be reinforcing an already deeply-embedded malaise.

Edith Kurzweil: That's our intention, Shirley. Thank you. Roger Kimball.

Roger Kimball: Two comments, one to Lindsay Waters. I would be very curious to know how Paul de Man and Randall Jarrell were up to the same sort of thing. I wonder if you could give a fifteen-second version of that. Also, since you are at Harvard University Press, exercising

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the kind of discrimination you were calling for, I wonder how you would respond to the criticism Mr. Phillips made of one of your own books, by Barbara Herrnstein Smith. It seems to me that while one can criticize people who haven't read this theoretical stuff for talking without knowing what they're saying, many of the critics have indeed read it and have made very pungent criticisms, which you have not really answered. My second question is for Mr. Dickstein. Since he did not really answer Ronald Radosh's question, I was wondering if he might respond to the notion that what he has really done is to occupy a specious middle ground between a caricature of the left and a caricature of the right.

Morris Dickstein: By creating a caricature of the center?

Roger Kimball: Well, the idea that the categories of race, gender and class are analogous to categories like paradox and irony seems to me to be profoundly mistaken.

Morris Dickstein: Why?

Roger Kimball: Because the latter categories are literary categories. The former are social science categories.

Morris Dickstein: Well, I was describing the shift from the emphasis on the text to the emphasis on the context. It seems to me that race, class and gender could be seen to maintain a similar position in a contextual view of literature or a social view of literature that paradox and ambiguity maintain in a purely textual view of literature.

Roger Kimball: No, I think the issue here is the reduction of literature to, or the use of literature for, nonliterary ends. And that's a central aspect of the question which I don't believe you have addressed.

Morris Dickstein: You think the social approach to literature is inherently nonliterary?

Roger Kimball: I think that the use of literature – indeed the use of any art – for nonartistic ends is something that has to be criticized.

Morris Dickstein: What is literature about? The life described in literature is nonartistic. The life described in literature is the world, the culture we know.

Roger Kimball: The issue here is the reduction of literature to political

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categories. The issue is not whether literature depicts life. Of course it does. That's what we're all interested in investigating. The issue is the use of literature for nonliterary ends.

Morris Dickstein: But literature itself is inherently nonliterary, or inherently it has a dimension which is literary and a dimension which is nonliterary. I think your operative word is reductive. We would have to look at individual cases to decide which readings are unduly narrow and reductive. It seems to me obvious that any new set of literary or critical categories, by holding up the literary object in a different way, will prismatically reveal some different facet of it, perhaps useful, perhaps utterly useless, about the object. If you take, for example, the poetry of Yeats in relation to the romantic tradition, you'll get one kind of observation; if you recontextualize Yeats in terms of the Irish literary tradition, you'll get another set of observations. If you take Edith Wharton in relation to Henry James, you'll get one set of observations; if you try to look at her as a woman writer, you may decide finally that she does not belong to any strictly female literary tradition. But you may also get some minor or greater insight into things which you would otherwise have missed. I'm not going to prejudge that. The success of individual critics depends on whether they can apply these categories broadly, with some real literary sensibility.

Edith Kurzweil: I want to add that we're really talking here about the crisis in the culture and not just the crisis within departments of literature; and that in sociology, history, economics, and all the other social sciences, literature is being "used" in idiosyncratic ways. We might want to take note of that. For instance, in reference to Roger Shattuck's comment, I want to say yes, we may or may not agree about the notion of postmodernism and we may not understand it – none of us do. However, it is accepted now, taken up in various disciplines. You have a whole literature in sociology, for example, and I believe in history, which accepts the term "postmodernism." So we're stuck with it, whether we like it or not. So I think we must discuss it.

Lindsay Waters: Will you let me make my fifteen-second response?

Edith Kurzweil: Please do.

Lindsay Waters: I'm not going to respond for Barbara Herrnstein Smith. She's best doing so herself. She wrote the three-hundred page book laying out her position, and there are many interesting reviews of it. In my particular view, it fits into this discussion insofar as she is simply

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saying that the process of discrimination does not stop, that it is ongoing. So that's one version of what that book is about – against people who she might argue have allowed the process of discrimination to end at a certain point.

On the question of de Man and Randall Jarrell, I think Jarrell, in commenting on *The Age of Criticism*, is objecting in part to the reduction of literature beneath critical concepts, concepts which either fit literature into what is brought in from the outside, or which argue that a literary work could have a particular concept that could be pulled out of it. That's very similar, though as a poet he finds this less than satisfactory. He'd rather have people read his words and not just his lips, or imagine meanings for the texts. De Man in the 1950s was also trying to argue against the notion that literature can be reduced to concepts. In general he argued against the Hegelian version of how literature works. But it's something other than what can be reduced to the conceptual.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you.

Jean Bethke Elshtain: I just wanted to respond very briefly to some of the comments concerning the Other and the fear of the Other. It seems to me, and I thank Edith for reminding us all of this, that we are talking not just about the universities but about the way in which universities are nested in a wider culture. That is, there's a cultural set of themes and concerns that we take up and must take up. Having said that, let me just remind you that the rigid, solipsistic encoding of the self and of one's own group, the rigidifying of difference – that women can't speak to men, men can't speak to women, blacks to whites, whites to blacks, and so on – is in fact taking place in the wider political culture, not just in the universities. It is becoming more and more difficult for groups to debate with one another and to have any kind of meaningful or fruitful dialogue. Insofar as any tradition, whether it's literary or political, involves the permanent and fruitful conflict and debate and contestation between conservatism (tradition) and transformation, it seems to me we're in danger of losing that richness – ironically, in the name of recognizing and celebrating difference. That's a real problem, if, as I said, you can't speak outside your own skin or your own group, then democratic politics become very difficult indeed.

Edith Kurzweil: Ed Rothstein.

Edward Rothstein: I don't have a question for any panelist in particular, but I wanted to address the question of the Other and the matter of inclusion that has come up so often, and which could be looked at as

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one of the major themes of the culture of the university now. The standard view is that in some way Western civilization in all of its manifestations has been exclusive of the Other; in the more radical criticisms it is described as being hostile or imperialistic or domineering to the Other. And the connections are made not just in the arts and in literature but also in the history of exploration, in the debates going on now about the celebration of the journey of Columbus, and so on. It seems to me that this picture is wrongheaded, that we need a really radical reexamination of this issue. Because if, in fact, one looks at the Western literary tradition, what one sees at any point is not an exclusion of the Other but a fascination with the Other that goes far beyond what any other culture in world history has ever engaged in. In Western philosophy this seems almost a transcendental urge to understand not just me and my surroundings but what is common and universal about humankind. In fact, I would argue that one of the fundamental characteristics of Western civilization has been this concern with the transcendental perspective. The perversity of multiculturalism and the arguments over inclusion are in a strange ironic way an outgrowth of this transcendental perspective, a sort of perversion of transcendentalism that actually risks undoing the very virtues of Western civilization that made this possible.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. One last comment until we break.

Joe Flynn: I'm from the State University of New York. It seems to me we should be very careful not to degenerate to easy dismissal. When we talk about Henry Louis Gates we should not talk about 2 Live Crew but about the enormous amount of work he's done for rescuing nineteenth-century women writers, for discovering novels that have been virtually dismissed. We should not pick out an individual remark that pits him against Richard Wright, which is probably as inaccurate as focusing on James Baldwin's disagreement.

What I find a little peculiar is that the crisis in the university is repeated historically when we fail to realize our own traditions and their continuity. It seems to me that Morris Dickstein was trying to point out the way in which he and Mr. Phillips share an ongoing tradition. If there is a crisis in the university, or in the culture of the university, it is certainly not a new crisis, and it may also relate to how we successfully integrate our own specialized discoveries into the culture of the university.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Morris, would you like to answer?

Morris Dickstein: I realize that I didn't respond directly to Ron Radosh's and Mr. Kimball's point about whether I had made a spurious

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equation between the cultural conservatives and the left. It seemed to me that the equation would go as follows: some conservatives, not all, have what I would describe as an excessively ossified, hierarchical, and immutable view of the cultural tradition. If you take something like Allan Bloom's attack on relativism in *The Closing of the American Mind*, you could use it as a basis for dismissing virtually all of modern thought and art since the eighteenth century, since all of it partakes of a good deal of secular relativism. At the other extreme, postmodernists, relying on pastiche and parody, represent a radical version of relativism, a complete dismissal of distinctions between high and low culture. But from a centrist position on cultural hierarchy, one could point out that there's always been a very porous wall between high and middle and low culture. There has been an explosion of popular culture in the twentieth century, often using the same esthetic languages as the traditional arts, yet high and low culture addressed themselves to audiences in strikingly different ways, without being fully sealed off. Despite some hostility, there's been an extraordinary degree of interaction between high and low culture. But there is a clear symmetry between the absolutism, the canonical absolutism of the Allan Bloom type and the extraordinary canonical relativism of the postmodernist type.

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The Impact of the Media

William Phillips: Since I'm moderating this session, I'll put on my neutral and moderate hat. I don't know whether I'll stick to my neutrality, but I'll try. The three speakers today are: Robert Brustein, Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theatre, which is doing such a wonderful job at Harvard. He is a renowned drama critic and essayist. Hilton Kramer is Editor of *The New Criterion*, a well-known art and cultural critic, and author of *The Age of the Avant-Garde*. Julius Lester teaches in the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His most recent book is *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*.

Hilton Kramer: Our subject in this session is the impact of the media on the university. It is one of the peculiarities of our time, this particular time in the last decade of the twentieth century, that in a meeting like the present one in which writers, professors, students (one hopes), scholars, academic administrators, educators, and observers of intellectual and academic life – at a meeting like this in which these specialists have been brought together to examine the condition of the university in America, we should want to examine the subject of the impact of the media on the university. It couldn't have happened in an earlier time. Surely I am not alone here today in thinking that the relation that obtains between these two subjects - the university and the media - has about it the air of the oxymoronic, the suggestion of things almost farcically contradictory and categorically at odds. For what in their essence do these terms - the university and the media - represent but a fundamental contradiction of the way in which they address the life of the mind? The university, whether in its humanistic, artistic, scientific, or professional disciplines, derives its authority, or at least once derived its authority, from its devotion to the tasks of enlightenment, however much those tasks may have become debased in recent developments. It derives its authority from its devotion to the search for truth, its dedication to the understanding of the achievements of mind, its consecration to the highest standards of intellectual discipline. I shall take it for granted in this discussion that we may still use these terms - "truth," "mind," "excellence," "discipline," "enlightenment" - without hesitation or embarrassment, though I know and you know that elsewhere - not among us, the enlightened here today, but among a great many other people in universities now – these are no longer terms that are deemed permissible to use in discussing the culture of the university at the present time. Still, I shall use them without embarrassment. But if, as I believe, the university derives or should

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derive its authority from its devotion to the tasks of enlightenment, from what, we must ask, do the media derive their authority?

The media come to us in a variety of shapes, forms, and densities, but if we start with the most powerful of the media systems, television, I think we can say with some confidence that its general function is to mislead, befuddle, corrupt, and lay waste the minds that look to it as their principal source of entertainment and information; indeed, as their principal source of thought. Now, it is not my view that this comes about as the result of a conspiracy, but rather because of the nature of the medium itself. Most neutrally stated (or at least as neutrally as I can state it), it is in the nature of television as a medium to simplify and thus radically distort and caricature whatever subject or situation it addresses. It does this not only or even primarily in some cases because of the mental level at which the television industry believes it advantageous to pitch its programs, but also and more centrally perhaps because of the rate of speed at which the television screen devours the images and adumbrates the sentiments that are essential to its performance. It is the very dynamic of television, in other words, that distorts the reality, the truth, of whatever it may turn its attention to. In short, it is in the nature of television as a medium to lie to us about life. Are there exceptions? Of course there are, but they remain marginal, they remain episodic, and they remain on the decline.

Another aspect of the television medium, its basic subject now in some respects – whether the programming is devoted to soap operas, network news, advertising, sit-coms, mini-series or whatever - is lifestyle, which is to say, revisions in our moral attitudes toward the way we live our lives, or should live our lives, or might be persuaded to live our lives. To this basic subject of lifestyle in all its forms and implications is added the basic politics of television as a medium, which is a generalized, left-liberal politics, nowadays much dominated by a kind of popular feminism, as much to be seen in the television ads as in the programs themselves. It is a politics of role models that are basically drawn along feminist lines, and of course in the depiction of men no less than women, and in the depiction of the erosion of the alleged fiction about the differences that separate their identities. The politics of television adheres for the most part to a left-liberal feminist orthodoxy that provides the basic scenario of the lifestyle subject matter - those revisions in our moral attitudes toward the way we live our lives or might live our lives that is television's principal concern, and the principal message that it dispenses.

Television doesn't debate this issue or, indeed, for the most part any issue. It gives us a cartoon version of its ideological assumption of certainties. Now given the essential dynamism of television as a medium, this amounts to a saturation bombardment of caricature and cliché and of its

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fundamental point of view, which is to promote whatever orthodoxy the left-liberal establishment is promoting at the moment. With this basic donnée of television as a medium, it cannot be and generally is not anything but a source of a corrupting simplification in our thinking and in our culture.

As for the other media, now entirely subordinate to television in its role in culture and society, those other media called newspapers and magazines, which we all recognize are on the decline – their response has not been what one might have theoretically imagined it to have been, if only in the interests of their survival. It has not been to provide a medium of greater complexity, of wider-ranging thought and ideas. The tendency of these other media, magazines and especially newspapers, has been to ape television in its fundamental dynamics.

I noted with dismay – a familiar feeling of dismay – in this morning's *New York Times* a front-page news story about the strike of the unions against *The Daily News* in New York. In this story there was a general consideration of how this would affect the future of the remaining newspapers in New York City. And one found a very alarming reference to a statement by the proprietors of *The New York Times* to the effect that the collapse of *The Daily News*, should it come, would not result in what was described as a "reaching down" to a larger and less-informed, lower-level readership. Alas, as soon as I saw that denial of a decision to pursue a "reaching down," I could tell – based on my many years of experience at that institution – that this process of "reaching down" was already in progress. As a reader of the paper nowadays can tell, it is already in evidence. Eight years ago, when I left *The Times*, the two journalistic models already being adopted as those toward which *The Times* should aspire were *U.S.A. Today* and *People* Magazine, both of which (whatever else one can say about them) have succeeded in giving us a kind of printed version of video television culture. And in that story in *The Times* this morning, with the report (not for the first time) of the color presses that *The Times* had acquired – soon to be used in its editorial columns as well as in its advertising – you could see that this was the direction in which the paper was heading, a direction toward precisely that culture of caricature and simplification that television has so successfully pioneered.

But our subject today is the impact of the media on the university. We know that the impact of the media as it now exists on the university has been a corrupting impact. We know that a good deal of what university teaching has to contend with is this culture of simplifications, caricatures and lies that students bring with them to the university, as if they were bringing a state of nature. For more and more students find it impossible to distinguish between media culture and outside life, what

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might be called "real life," because there has been so little, in their education and in their upbringing before coming to the university, that encouraged them to make the requisite distinctions between culture and life itself. Such distinctions are lacking not only in the students, who are in many respects the involuntary victims of the media culture, but also in the faculty and the administration, who are more and more inclined to countenance and indeed initiate the substitution of media artifacts, media studies, media propaganda for the traditional objects of study. Indeed, they have allowed media culture to supplant humanistic culture as the basic standard of discussion.

The urgency of the university's mission, its mission of enlightenment, is all the greater because of the dominance of this media culture. But the mission has suffered a tremendous collapse of moral imperative, of belief in its own vocation. In the face of the challenge represented from the media and its culture, the university has suffered a crippling wave of demoralization, a fundamental inability to mobilize and revitalize a sense of its high mission in our democratic society. The university, too, is in the process, in the words of this morning's *New York Times* story, of "reaching down" rather than of lifting up. We all know that's the case.

In short, the impact of the media on the university has been devastating, and it is in the light (or perhaps one should say the darkness) of that devastation that every other subject under review at this conference this weekend needs to be viewed. That is, so to speak, the medium in which the university now lives. But to examine it, I grant you, is a melancholy task. Thank you.

Robert Brustein: I find myself in agreement with much of what Hilton has said regarding the corrupting quality of the media and, as happens so often, I find myself agreeing with Hilton's diagnoses and analyses and while disagreeing with his conclusions. The conclusion that the media have helped to debase the university is, I think, correct. I think all of us who teach are aware that we must explain things that were obvious ten or fifteen or twenty years ago, familiar names, basic concepts, basic traditions which our students do not bring to the classroom. They bring instead knowledge mostly derived from the media, which is why some teachers are now beginning to use images and analogies and metaphors from television shows rather than from the great intellectual traditions that they should be teaching. I don't agree with Hilton that this is the result of some conspiracy, a left-liberal conspiracy, in the media at present. I think probably that, like much else in our country, it is economically determined. Sponsors and producers and the networks will feature anything that brings profit and attracts enough viewers. Whatever is

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popular these days is what's going to be shown. If antifeminism is popular in the next decade, then that will be featured, too. I see television as a much more economically determined and inevitable system than apparently you do, Hilton

I think the great danger of the media in regard to the university, in regard to our society as a whole, is the way it locks people inside their own homes. We're losing our sense of community. We're losing our capacity to mingle with other people, to walk in the street, because every day some new technological invention makes it possible for us to stay home – to do our banking, to do our shopping, to create an entertainment center in our living room, or a music center, an audiovisual center – pretty soon we won't have to leave the house at all. And I think this relates to the general sense of threat and danger in the streets, intensified by the fact that we don't function as pedestrians helping to make the streets safe. I believe this is now true of every major urban center in the country: they have become desolate and deserted after dark, whereas in the past they were thoroughfares of bustle, vitality, and excitement. If we're not going to turn into moles, we'd better find alternatives to imprisoning ourselves in our homes and our apartments. The university is one such source of community. It's a place where people mingle, where students and teachers communicate with each other. That's a reason why I think it's important to have theater, particularly professional theater, in the university and elsewhere. Professional theater brings people together, as do dance and opera and the other performing arts. And a significant difference between the theater, for example, and television or even the movies, is that with a screen you want to be alone with your fantasies; you don't want anyone sitting next to you. You prefer an empty movie theater or an empty living room. Whereas in the theater it's very unpleasant if there's a whole role of seats and you're alone in it. You want people around. You want some companionship. So in effect the performing arts in the university help to intensify and incease the sense of community, the social ideal, that we're begining to lose, largely as a result of the media.

Julius Lester: I guess I am the odd one today. First I'd like to say that when I agreed to appear on this panel I was informed that I would receive a copy of your paper by September, but I'm hearing it for the first time this morning. So I feel somewhat at a disadvantage that I'm not able to respond as fully as I would like.

I think there's a great danger in turning the media into a villain, and the presentation this morning seems to me to be doing that and to be giving the media almost the power of Mephistopheles in society. It's leaving out, it seems to me, the whole question of audience and that the

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audience has choices. Authority. I like very much what you said about the authority of the university and how that's derived, but it seems to me that ultimately the authority of any institution in society is derived from the society which it serves. So that to talk about the media and not to talk about audience is to leave out an important part of the equation.

The statement that was made that it is in the nature of television to lie to us about life, I think, is an overstatement. It is also in the nature of television to bring to us the entire world, to bring to me a world that I could not experience personally if I spent all of my life traveling. It is in the nature of television to enable me to see things that I could never see. If one wants to watch violence on television, then one need only watch the Discovery Channel. The Discovery Channel shows films twenty-four hours a day of animals killing animals and eating them. However, I find that the Discovery Channel brings me an intimacy with and views of nature that I simply could not have on my own. The mere fact of the close-up in television enables me to see things in detail that I could not see with the naked eye. So I think there's another side to television that must also be acknowledged if we're going to have a whole picture – that it's not in the nature of the medium to lie. Certainly, the medium can lie, but it also brings us many truths which we simply would not be aware of otherwise.

To talk about the media is really to talk about the society we live in. To talk about the university is to talk about the society we live in. If the society did not derive something from the media, the media would have no choice but to change to get an audience. Therefore, it seems to me that we have to talk about what it is in American society that responds to and enjoys the media level that it does, which in many instances is not very high, and what that says about our society. A student coming to the university is bringing the society into that particular arena, into a very specialized kind of society. A part of that is the student's relationship to the media. In teaching at the university I have found, due to the huge impact of the media, that we now have a second or third generation of students who are accustomed to learning visually – learning through print is increasingly difficult. They are accustomed to wanting to learn instantly, which I think is a result of *Sesame Street*. They want it to be fun. I'm so tired of hearing my children say, "Well, this class is not fun"; or "This teacher is not fun"; and I say to them, "Well, it's nice if it's fun but you have to learn even if it's not fun." *Sesame Street* has made learning fun, so when kids get to school and it's not fun then they don't want to learn. This is a real change in values as well as in the whole process of learning. However, according to my definition of the university, it consists of the professor and the student, and when I close the door of my classroom I am in charge. So the media has not taken away

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my authority as a professor, the authority to make demands, to challenge, confound, and confuse, and all the things a teacher is supposed to do. I think that any professor who relinquishes that authority to the media is basically giving up the power that the university has despite everything that's there.

It was stated that students have difficulty distinguishing between media culture and life. I would like to caution against oversimplifying students. I am amazed over and over again at how much life my students have experienced by age eighteen, and how incapable they are of dealing with that. Many students in my classes have had parents who were alcoholics, have suffered the death of a parent. Two days ago a student came into my office saying he would not be in class next semester because he was undergoing his eighteenth operation for water on the brain. I think we stereotype and oversimplify students: they are facing a world I did not face when I was eighteen – a world in which resources are dwindling, in which the ozone layer is depleting, and which is threatened by acid rain. None of us going to school in the fifties and sixties had to deal with the level of anxiety and uncertainty and insecurity that students do now. So I have a profound respect for students who are working as hard as we did to make sense of a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to life itself. Yes, they are influenced by the media. I remember when my stepdaughter (who is eighteen years old) saw the film *Dead Poets Society*. It raised for her questions about the relationship of the individual to society, rebellion and conformity: she had never encountered any of these questions. We then talked about those issues at home as she tried to work them through. I just want to warn against oversimplifying. The picture is much more complex than what we've heard so far.

William Phillips: I would like to ask some questions but first, would you want to reply to your commentators, Hilton?

Hilton Kramer: Yes, first, to Bob Brustein's point about the ideological character of television being the result of an economically determined program. Yes, in some general way that's true. Television is a business and it's in business to make a profit. But that doesn't really address the question of what shapes its ideological content and why, from one period to another. After all, the television networks in the fifties were just as concerned with making a profit as they are in 1990, but the shift from what might loosely be called "family values" to what might loosely be called "uncontingent self-fulfillment" which dominates television today – that is, the shift to an emphasis on total autonomy of self – this is not economically determined. That's determined by the political and cultural

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values television shares with the elite culture of the moment - what I call the intellectual academic elite culture. And at this moment, television derives its ideological content not from, say, family values as they were defined in the fifties but from feminist values as they came to be defined in the eighties. Now, I don't think you can relegate that to the superstructure as basically an expression of economic relations, because it does change from one period to another.

About Mr. Lester's point, on turning the media into a villain, I guess I do believe that it does play a villainous role. Of course there are exceptions, as I noted, but these tend to be marginal. And I wasn't much assured, frankly, about the benign state of the media when Mr. Lester cited all those students who come to the university with concern about ozone levels. Where did they get that concern? Not from the study of science. Not from the disinterested view of scientific inquiry. They got that view from the media, and it passed into their heads as an unexamined piety. Now, it may very well be true, and probably is true, that there is something damaging happening to the ozone layer. My point is that the students come to the university with anxieties they have ingested from the media in a wholly unexamined way, as they do about other aspects of life and society. The task of educating them really falls to the university, to turn those unexamined pieties into questions that can be analyzed by the most informed and disinterested disciplines of inquiry. This is what I think is seriously damaged in the university today.

Julius Lester: But when the media reports about the ozone layer, they are not making up information, they are reporting information which has been developed in universities.

William Phillips: This leads me to two questions, but first I want to point out that the best thing the media - that is, television - does is the showing of sports. They have no ideological content whatsoever. There they don't seem to be pandering to, or to be influenced by, deleterious forces. My two questions are to Mr. Lester and to Hilton Kramer. Mr. Lester has been saying that the media are satisfying the needs and desires of the audience. But don't you think, as it seems to me, that the media have played an important role in creating those desires and needs? The audience starts from scratch, in a sense. My question for Hilton Kramer: you haven't addressed (although you've implied, and there have been suggestions) the reverse influence of the university on the media. Don't you think that in some diluted, very diluted, and perhaps indirect form, many of the things you call the left-liberal atmosphere of the media have reached the media from the pundits in the universities? From the experts - the so-called scientific experts and the ideological experts.

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Julius Lester: I'm not certain that the audience is a kind of *tabula rasa*, as it were. Television is very responsive to whatever people want to watch, which is why programs come and programs go. So I don't know that television has the power to create a desire in an audience, and I guess that if I am to believe in all of those virtues of the mind and the potential in human beings that Hilton Kramer eloquently described, then I have to have some respect for the audience and some respect that the audience is not just a blank slate waiting to be written on by this mysterious force called media.

Hilton Kramer: Yes, one could say a great deal about the impact of the universities on the media. If we had time to go into that question it would require from me a long memoir of seventeen years at *The New York Times*. I discovered early on that for most, not all, reporters and editors, the general liberal view of politics and society, as well as what came to be called lifestyle, was by and large not considered a political view. The reporters and editors were not deliberately distorting the news to conform to their bias. They simply had no means of recognizing that it was a bias. That is, they regarded the liberal view of the world as a kind of state of nature, and it was only people who questioned it or opposed it who were considered political or, as the saying went, ideological. Liberalism was not considered an ideological position, it was normalcy. For instance, journalists who supported abortion rights (I'm talking about an earlier period, because there's been much more militancy on the part of pro-abortion politics in the eighties) genuinely did not believe that they took a political position on abortion. Only people opposed to abortion were thought to be political on the question. Almost every issue under political contention was perceived that way by the media. Now, certainly from the midsixties on (I came to *The Times* in 1965) the younger journalists who came to *The Times* and to other branches of the media certainly were shaped by the radicalization that overtook the universities in the sixties and early seventies. Therefore, the assumptions about what (to use this figure I've been using) constituted a "state of nature" rather than a political vision naturally encompassed more and more political territory. And there was very little resistance to that on the part of *The Times* or on the part of the media generally. By and large the kind of men and women who wanted to become journalists came out of the left-liberal culture of the universities. At that time, Abe Rosenthal, first Managing Editor and then Executive Editor of *The Times*, was said to be a conservative or a neoconservative, and that was generally true about two-and-a-half days a week. The rest of the time he was a flaming liberal. And when challenged by his conservative friends,

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on the two or two-and-a-half days a week when he was in communication with them, as to.why he hired so many left-liberal reporters and editors, his response was that they should find him some conservative reporters and editors. They were very hard to come by. The university produced very few at that time. In the last decade or so, largely because of the "venomous neoconservatism" that Professor Dickstein referred to, a few more perhaps are dotting the media landscape, but they are still a distinct minority.

Robert Brustein: Hilton brings up an interesting point. I think we ought to remind ourselves, since memories are short, that it wasn't until the last eight or ten years that a legitimate conservative position developed in this country. It wasn't all that long ago that Lionel Trilling was lamenting, in his introduction to *The Liberal Imagination*, the lack of significant conservative minds against which liberals could measure their own. It is natural for the culture and the media and the university to reflect the prevailing political thought of any given time. I grew up in a time when movies, for example, assumed that individuals could change the society – that Mr. Deeds could go to town and Mr. Smith could go to Washington – and really have an impact on the direction of our lives. I also lived through a period, during World War Two, when almost every movie celebrated the supremacy, idealism, honor, and bravery of American soldiers – as compared to villainous "Nips" and murderous "Krauts." If you look at those movies today, they're embarrassing because they implicitly carry an unrelenting, uncompromising, unmediated ideology. As another example, for at least a decade, it has been assumed that any government agency, and especially the CIA and the FBI, was fundamentally corrupt and ideologically closer to America's enemies than to its citizens. Now we are beginning to see some influence from neoconservatives. Obviously things change more slowly in the media than elsewhere, but you can see conservative and neoconservative influence on such movies as *Working Girls*, on the surface a film about feminism and the fulfillment of ambition, but really about how women have an equal right to stick stiletto heels in their competitors' eyes on their way up the ladder to success. That is essentially a conservative idea.

William Phillips: Why is that a conservative idea, Bob? It sounds like a misogynist idea.

Robert Brustein: It's essentially a Darwinian idea. Conservative economics and conservative ideology are based to a large degree on Darwinism.

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Hilton Kramer: I'd like to make one further comment in relation to the concluding comment by Morris Dickstein this morning. After comfortably situating himself in this mythical liberal center, he pleaded: Isn't it time for the liberals to speak? This seems a curious plea since the liberals have dominated the universities, the media and culture generally, have dominated virtually everything except presidential elections for some decades. It reminds me of that last comment of Simon Leys, the sinologist who wrote recently about China in *The New York Review of Books* an absolutely shattering account of the 50 million lives that were lost through Mao's "great leap forward" and the 100 million that may have been lost through Mao's Cultural Revolution. Certainly Simon Leys has given us a more detailed account of the devastation and destruction caused by Maoism in China than any other writer I know of. But in the very last sentences of that article, Simon Leys did what we might call a "Dickstein": he said Marxism is very unpopular in China today, and for understandable reasons, but it's unfair because it was never tried. Well, how many millions of people have to die before you can say that it's been tried? And how much of - if I may borrow a term from the left - a hegemony does liberalism have to acquire over our culture, our media, and our universities before we can acknowledge that they have dominated? It's not a question of "isn't it time for the liberals to speak up?" You have not been silent.

William Phillips: We will now respond to hands from the floor.

Eugene Goodheart: I teach at Brandeis University. My question or my puzzlement is directed to Hilton Kramer. What I find odd about your characterization is that you hyphenate liberal and left. Liberal and left mean the same thing to you. In my own experience the liberals for the past fifteen or twenty years have been the object of a kind of radical attack, certainly since the sixties. According to the left, the liberals were the villains, not the conservatives. It's the liberals who created the Vietnam scenario. And so I think that your argument is really based on an ideological construction and the ideological construction depends upon the trope "liberal-left." I'm also impressed by the way your critique resembles the critique of radicals in the sixties and the seventies in which a statement was always suspect because it had ideological motives. You could never take a statement on its face value. There was always some kind of ideological bias. My question is: Is there an ideological bias in your use of words like "truth" and "mind"? Is there a neoconservative ideological bias? Because I suspect that when you speak of your position positively you see it free of ideological distortion.

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Hilton Kramer: No, I don't see my position free of ideological attachment, but I do feel that it is relatively (as these things go) free of distortion. The formulation of a left-liberal position on politics, I think, is a legitimate one, and particularly in speaking about the media. What happens in the media is that the arguments (and there are arguments, although they've much diminished in the course of the last fifteen years) between the liberals and the left, as they get to be communicated into the world of the media, the most extreme positions on the left-liberal continuum tend to be absorbed. What twenty years ago would have been considered extreme is now being considered centrist. We heard Professor Dickstein talk about that this morning. As a result, there basically is no liberal center now that bears any relation to what liberalism was thirty or forty years ago. It has to a greater degree than you're willing to acknowledge been devoured by the critique of the left, so that there are fewer and fewer works, fewer and fewer positions now that represent a kind of classic liberal position, such as color-blind justice. But that's not the left-liberal position now. The whole question of opposition to affirmative action, to quotas - that was a classic liberal position. But that's not the left-liberal position now. I was one of those liberals, I've been there.

Eugene Goodheart: You're saying two things at once. You're saying the left has devoured the liberal position, and if it has done so, then the liberal position no longer exists in the university. In that case you have simply a left position. Why then do you call that left position a liberal-left position?

Hilton Kramer: Because there's a great deal of oscillation between liberalism and the left. I would say liberals today are those who occupied a left position until it got to be too embarrassing fifteen minutes ago. There's a great deal of oscillation between the left and the liberal terms of the dialectic. But the position that defined the classic liberal tenets of thirty or forty years ago have now all been devoured. They've been destroyed by the left.

Eugene Goodheart: So what does it mean to speak of this position as left-liberal?

Hilton Kramer: It describes people like yourself and Morris Dickstein who insist on presenting themselves as liberals.

Eugene Goodheart: No. As I understand what Morris Dickstein was saying, the liberal position has become very weak within the university,

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and attempts should be made to recover it and to strengthen it.

Hilton Kramer: Well, I support that, but that was not what I heard.

Eugene Goodheart: I don't think you support it, because the word liberal has an entirely negative connotation in everything you say.

Hilton Kramer: Well, it's become tarnished. Corrupted, perhaps.

Eugene Goodheart: Well, that should have been made clear in your presentation.

William Phillips: I think Hilton is saying that the position of liberalism has shifted. Here I happen to agree with him.

Catharine Stimpson: I am from Rutgers University, and I do want to say, Professor Lester, that your description of your students is very similar to my description of mine, and I thank you for making it. I also want to say that if we look at empirical studies we do see that faculty self-identification is middle-of-the-road. And it's very hard for me, after more years of faculty meetings than I like to remember, to imagine that the faculty has been devoured by radicalism. But I did have a question other than these querulous comments, to you, Mr. Kramer: I was flicking through television the other week. I saw cop shows, reruns; I saw Monday Night Football; I saw the World Series; I saw the Civil War shows that NEH financed; I saw *Nightline* and *MacNeil-Lehrer*; and on Sunday morning I saw a lot of televangelists. Where, Mr. Kramer, is the orthodox feminism?

Hilton Kramer: Well, you didn't mention the ads in which the women are all so much smarter than the men, and the general depiction of women in their social roles, in their vocational roles now determined by the feminist agenda. To deny that is to deny something that you, Professor Stimpson, have worked so hard to achieve. I know that no victory is complete enough for you, but I think you're wrong in not acknowledging that the inroads have been immense.

Catharine Stimpson: Would that I had such power!

Hilton Kramer: You will.

Catharine Stimpson: Oh, promises, promises, promises!

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Leonard Bushkoff: Moderator, I thought that we were going to have some civility here. All these wisecracks against Dickstein, against Professor Stimpson, are absolutely out of place.

William Phillips: Let's stop these recriminations, please. Let's continue the discussion of the subject. Morris, in rebuttal.

Morris Dickstein: It's difficult for me to see how Hilton Kramer simultaneously sees the liberal position as dominant and as already devoured. All of us know that there is a certain classic liberalism that barely survived into the twentieth century. Any analysis of the welfare state could show that it violates all sorts of tenets of classic nineteenth-century liberalism. The point on which I described the liberals as being quiescent or, as Gene Goodheart said, as weak and so on, was on the subject of this morning's panel, about theory and criticism, and the quiescent and weak role of liberals in relation to that particular juggernaut within the university, particularly within English departments. It is difficult to say why liberalism has been so quiet. It either suffered under the attack of the left or felt a bad conscience for in some way being considered complicit in some of the abuses that we all know have been associated with the Western tradition, along with its glories, including colonialism, and so forth. Also, there's always the problem of *pas d'ennemies à gauche*, and the difficulty of liberals in attacking a position to the left of liberalism. But this is precisely what I was calling for. As to the center, that is in the eye of the beholder.

But another point I wanted to make, before *I* became the subject of discussion, was about the relation of one's students to the media culture. It seems to me that because of the media and television, young people today feel they have instant and simultaneous access to everything that's happening anywhere in the world at any moment. They feel no surprise at being there for the coup in Chile and for anything that happens in any corner of the world. But they seem to have difficulty believing that people in the past ever actually existed and to have difficulty with any diachronic or historical view of reality. This present-mindedness of constant and simultaneous access is something for which the media bear some degree of responsibility. The media have never been able to give us a convincing account of what occurred in a premedia world. there are attempts: films like *Glory* and the multipart Civil War documentary try for some kind of meticulous recreation of some past time. This may indeed promote some of the discussion that Mr. Lester described or some sense of history. But I think there are among the isolated examples Hilton Kramer mentioned. I agree, the mindset of our students tends to be media-dominated, and I think the university should

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foster a more historical orientation – which would convince our students that other people truly existed in earlier times, and that their lives were as vivid and as passionate and as problematic as ours.

Hilton Kramer: I'll be brief. I would certainly agree with the last remarks Mr. Dickstein made. In the first part of his response, in which he speculated as to why liberalism had caved in to the left, I heard him say that it was a process by means of which liberalism was devoured by the left. You can use different words, but I believe that was the process.

Robert Brustein: Can I make one point? It seems to me that we have just seen liberalism caving in to the right, not to the left. If you think back historically to the thirties, traditional American liberalism was made up of people reacting against Stalinism – William, you were a leader in that regard – trying to define a liberal anti-Stalinist position. *Partisan Review* became the political flagship of that movement politically. In the sixties, many of those same liberals were pushed even further to the right by inflamed radical youth, who inflicted a wound on the psyches of us liberals from which some of us have never recovered. I think of a number of people who have since defined their entire ideological position on the basis of opposition to the youthful excesses of the sixties. This represents a gradual push to the right, until now, it seems to me, the traditional liberal (and I think Hilton once belonged to this group) has been completely overcome by conservatism. And that has left a big hole in the middle central position which has still to be redefined or filled.

Julius Lester: I want to repeat that I'm not a big fan or a defender of the media, but I think there's an underlying value in what you're talking about – in terms of the ahistoricity of students. One of our cherished American values is the value of convenience: we all want everything; we want it instantly; and if it's not convenient, there's something wrong. Therefore, it is very difficult for students to imagine the past. Part of that, I think, is a function of the age. But where are the professors who can inspire our students to use their imaginations? When students come into the classroom, their minds belong to me for however long it is. I can't blame the media or anybody else if I don't inspire them to use their minds or to imagine the past. We talk about the media in the university. Many courses in the university curriculum use films. In many courses film is now the major teaching tool. On principle, I will not use film. My students have to confront text, and they have to use their imagination. For the more power we give to the media, the more we're saying that we're helpless and can do nothing. In my classroom, I rule.

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Kevin Mulcahy: I teach political science, not English, at Louisiana State University. While listening, it occurred to me that the panel was by its nature restricted to television. From my observation, the medium that most defines students, I think, is alas, not so much books, as the culture they share: music. To a large degree music is seen by students as something they have more in their control. I'm thinking of, for instance, university radio stations which represent alternative cultural music for a lot of students. This is a culture they shape themselves, independent, I think, of the networks and television. So I share some of this despair but not completely. I wish my students knew that Bauhaus was not just a rock group but also a stylistic movement. Music is a culture, in many ways an adversarial culture, an alternative culture. Alas, it's not a literary culture. Maybe that is something we need to talk about, to get some notion of the canon as an alternative culture.

One last thing, in defense of 2 Live Crew. I listened to them at the behest of a student of mine because I was going to testify before the Independent Presidential Commission on the Arts. My subject was not censorship, it was the panel systems, but I felt part of this, so I listened. You know, the music is as nasty as you could imagine. I don't think they pretend to be anything else. But you brought Henry Louis Gates into the conversation. I do not know anything about him except what I read in the paper, and I don't know whether he contributed a literary analysis. But it's a very sad commentary that he had to be dragged in there to give his imprimatur, so that this stuff not be banned. It's pornographic. But why did we have to have a show trial with an "expert" witness from the academy? I respect Professor Gates, whoever he is, for being willing to testify. But I think we overestimate television in comparison to other modes of cultural analysis that students themselves bring to the university.

Victoria Longino: I'm from Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences, in the Liberal Arts department. After hearing you I feel you are overemphasizing the influence of the media. I think the major difficulty the university is facing is that we now are challenging the distortions that our students bring with them, whereas the university used to validate those distortions. But the most disturbing source of those distortions are the callous, ignorant politicians and intellectuals and other leaders who have access to public forums and who use the media to get their distressing ideas across.

Ronald Radosh: A few different points. One, I want to begin by criticizing Hilton and then, paradoxically, defending him. First, some of my best friends are feminists, including my wife. I don't see what's so bad

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about the feminist agenda. I wish that some conservatives would take to heart the admonition of Betsy Fox Genovese in her piece in *Chronicles* (a conservative magazine of culture) about two issues back, when she essentially argued that the broad idea of feminism, of rights for women, of full participation as equals, is not something conservatives should be against. She tried to argue (very effectively) that within the university, the feminist scholarship she's engaged in has played a positive role. I think one must differentiate between what one might call a radical feminist agenda, an ideological feminism that goes to extremes, and what I would call a broad, sensible feminism. And she argued this in a conservative magazine.

But back to the media. I confess to watching and enjoying television. And like Julius's stepdaughter who had a response to *Dead Poets' Society*, I've heard discussions from people who watch popular shows on television, and I watch some of these shows myself, and I find that even if the writers or directors have what you would call a left-liberal agenda, some of the shows manage to raise very probing, sensitive issues without giving stock answers. I think it would be retrograde to go back to the television programs of the fifties, which were rather mindless and bland. I think the quality has gone up. And I'm not talking about the serious efforts like *The Civil War* but about popular middlebrow culture.

As to the left-liberal agenda, I'm in agreement with you. Since I do watch a lot of television after ten p.m., I've gotten to see most of what's on the airwaves. And I've been astounded at the cop shows, at *Miami Vice*, *Crime Story*, that have depicted the crudest leftwing ideological view of the past twenty years' history. I saw episodes of *Miami Vice* on the Central American situation that were totally scandalous; one episode of *Miami Vice* made the North Vietnamese Communists the heroes in Vietnam, praising their morality and attacking the American side – all of it depicted as part of a cop show with a musical beat score. *Crime Story*, a very effective show, had a whole series about the takeover of Las Vegas by the mob and its collusion with the corrupt union. In *Crime Story* the mob came in and busted up a legitimate union movement. This episode took place in the fifties, and behind the speakers on stage was a giant placard with a picture of Karl Marx that said "Workers of the World Unite." Now, for the life of me, I don't think there was any Las Vegas union in the 1950s that had a picture of Marx and "Workers of the World Unite" behind them on their podium. So why does this happen? I think Hilton's answer in fact was correct. The great left-wing cultural critic Paul Buhle, with whom some of us have had rather hostile exchanges, points out in a recent essay that the Executive Producer of *Miami Vice*, one Michael Mann, came to his ideological

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manhood in the Wisconsin New Left. That's the answer. These people not only went into journalism, they went into television, and when they get into television at highly lucrative salaries, they write and direct shows justifying the mind-set they had developed in the sixties. It's not accidental that characters in *Thirty Something* – a fine show in many ways – sit around reading *The Nation* as the camera zooms in. Of the television viewers watching that show, probably one quarter of one percent read *The Nation*. But it's not accidental that that's the only magazine I ever saw anyone read on *Thirty Something*.

Karen Marco: I'm from the State University of New York. On the question of why we should focus on television when music seems so much more pervasive than radio and videos, and so forth, I think that Professor Lester touched on the answer. The question really is: what are people not doing when they're watching television? What they're not doing is reading. Our students typically will read and listen to music, but they don't read and watch television. And I suspect that the problem that many of us here are facing as professors is that when eighteen-year-olds come to our classes they're not in the habit of reading. And again it's not something that I would blame television for; I may blame the parents for it but not television. And I think that may be the crux of the issue and why we're focusing on television.

Marie Marchand: I'm a student from Colorado. I'd like to respond to the lady who was just up here that I'm in the library here to read all day, while visiting from Colorado. I go into the university with an open mind and don't bring television to it. I go for a college education; my mom was a nun, and she has mental health problems because of that; my dad was a cop; I have a fifty-year-old friend with AIDS. I'm a writer, and I'm published. That is what I bring to college. As to the cop shows, I can talk to my dad instead. I think students are going into college hungry for an education to erase from their minds what they've seen on television and to get the real story. That's why they're there. I just wanted to talk on behalf of students.

Lars Fennison: I'm a statistician from Tufts Medical School, so I feel like the odd man out among all you literary folks. I'm a little troubled by the comment on the producer who developed his radicalism on the Wisconsin New Left. If we follow this line, we're about to create a new and more modern version of the Hollywood Ten, who were attacked for their position on the old left in the thirties. I also want to speak about the whole question of the left-liberal position. I see a lot of liberals commenting on the day's news on television, and particularly in

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Boston I don't see any of the left. I'm thinking of the absence of Howard Zinn, of Noam Chomsky, and others who have, it seems to me, been frozen out of the local media. I would consider them to be more legitimate representatives of what we might call the left, at least our local left. So I don't see the dominance of the left-liberal position in the media here, but of the liberal position. I'd like some comments.

William Phillips: I think one thing we can do without is the charge of McCarthyism in characterizing some people's disagreements or points of view.

Hilton Kramer: I'd like to make a comment. Actually, from Ron Radosh's description of these television programs and their political projections, I think there is quite an interesting parallel with the movies made by the Hollywood Ten. Historians should explore this interesting question because the sort of ideological mind-set that the Hollywood Ten introduced programmatically to their films, pretty much by their own admission, came out of the Communist Party positions of the period. So far from its being in any way pernicious to suggest that some of these political ideas came out of the Wisconsin New Left - a subject Professor Radosh is somewhat of an expert on and has the scars to show it - you've touched on something really fundamental to the relationship between politics and the media in the last half of this century.

Edith Kurzweil: I just want to make one very quick, minor point. This touches on Hilton Kramer's first point, about the simplification in the media. I tried to interest one of the most prestigious programs on public television in covering our conference, and I was told they decided against it because they thought this conference would be too highbrow.

William Phillips: Good point.

Hilton Kramer: I'd like to make a comment apropos of something that was said this morning and that has come up in discussion of the conservative or neoconservative view of education and the canon. It was said, I think, that neoconservatives have some ossified view of the canon, that it's fixed for all time, that there's nothing new to be added to cultural life, and so on. I refuse to plead guilty to that charge. I have a very long record as a critic, dealing mainly with new art, new additions to the Western tradition of art. Certainly in the years I wrote for *The Times*, I was usually the first critic to write about them. So I refuse that charge; it constitutes a total and demagogic misrepresentation of the neoconservative attitude toward culture and the arts. It is just categori-

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cally not true.

Robert Brustein: I'd like to confirm that. Thirty years ago I was rebuked by Hilton Kramer because I had written on the subject of abstract expressionism, about which I knew little. He criticized me for not recognizing its potential and its capacity as an art form. And I thought of Hilton from that time forth as one of the defenders of avant-garde art. But I think you have made a severe turn from that position, Hilton. For whatever reasons (I would guess they're more political than esthetic) you have, it seems to many of us, closed the door on avant-garde art, saying it had no other purpose than as a plaything for the wealthy, to shock society, then stick its hand out for subsidies. However, avant-garde art, as you well know, historically explored the outer boundaries of what is known. And if a side effect was shock, well, so be it. But it was not the main purpose of Joyce, of Picasso, of Stravinsky, of Duchamp to shock. In writing Molly Bloom's soliloquy, Joyce explored the unconscious of a woman on the verge of sleep. And if that included some words that seemed shocking at the time, Joyce was not prepared to censor them. It seems to me that if Joyce were writing today he would be subject to the same kind of vilification that is now being directed towards avant-garde artists by political ideologues.

As for your remark about the Hollywood Ten, it's true that some of these writers smuggled secret Communist propaganda into their movies. But the issue gets clouded if you say, therefore, they should not have been allowed to make movies. That, I think, is the issue before us today: the inquisitorial quality that has crept into our society, into our lives, into the very way we evaluate art – that suggest such art should not be allowed to be made. At this point, one has to function as much as a civil libertarian as an art critic.

Hilton Kramer: One of the reasons I was particularly pleased to come and speak here today was that it's one of the few invitations I've had lately that didn't involve an invitation to speak about the NEA and the scandals and uproars that have surrounded it lately. But I see that it was virtually impossible for this discussion to be concluded without being nudged in that direction. Since Bob has now nudged it, I feel obliged to respond.

I have to reject the notion that my fundamental attitudes toward "new art" have in any way been altered by politics or any other consideration. I do not consider the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe a standard by which one's response to avant-garde art has to be judged. Mapplethorpe is a thoroughly third-rate photographic artist. In the exhibition the Museum of Modern Art mounted last year, organized by John Szarkowski, the director of the photography department (I think

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he would not be offended by being described as a liberal), called "Photography Until Now," which focused on what, in Mr. Szarkowski's view, were the greatest achievements of the photographic medium, there was no Mapplethorpe photograph. He too recognized Mapplethorpe as third-rate. If not for the sexual content in Mapplethorpe, there would have been no exhibition; there would have been no uproar; there would have been no controversy. I reject the notion that Mapplethorpe is to be regarded as the standard by which we are to judge a response to new art. If I were to come up with a list of the really accomplished new artists whose work I have not only praised but have often been the first to praise, say between 1980 and 1990, you would be here long through your lunch hour. So I categorically reject that. It's not true. It may be true that you don't like some of my political positions and you don't like some of the terms in which I have defended the right to reject an artist like Mapplethorpe on various grounds. But it really misrepresents my record as a critic to say that I have turned my back on new art for political reasons. That's a libel and I reject it.

Robert Brustein: I would like to repeat, however, and I think you have demonstrated it right here, that you confuse your political criteria with your artistic criteria. You are at liberty to say, and you may very well be right, that Mapplethorpe is a third-rate artist. What is your position on whether or not his photographs should be shown?

Hilton Kramer: I have no objection and never had any objection when I reviewed Mapplethorpe at the Robert Miller Gallery a number of times, before there ever was a museum show. I had no position against their exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York in the summer of 1988. I felt free to say that I thought that he was a failed artist, and I gave my reasons. What I did take a position against in the summer of 1989, in an article in *The New York Times* was the allocation of taxpayers' money for the exhibition of those works. I think public money involves another kind of responsibility, another kind of standard, than work that is either shown in the open market or through private patronage. And the distinction between publicly supported art and art that is not publicly supported, I think, is a perfectly legitimate one to make.

Robert Brustein: But insofar as that is a moral stand it seems to me completely indistinguishable from the left, which would also impose political, and its own kind of moral, constraints on art. You say you're not suppressing art if it's allowed to enter the marketplace, but as you well know the marketplace has its own forms of censorship. If the mar-

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ketplace is to determine what is going to be seen, then we will be watching *Miami Vice* and its equivalent.

Hilton Kramer: Well, the market certainly has not suppressed Mapplethorpe. His estate has made millions of dollars and was already making huge profits even before the controversy, because sex sells and if not for those sexual photographs there would have been no exhibition. There wouldn't have been a retrospective of those flowers touring museums, believe me.

Robert Brustein: Sex sells when it is presented to the public as scandal, as the NEA and you have done. The same thing happened to Karen Finaly. I don't think she would have had more than eighty people at any of her performances if the NEA had not created a scandal by blocking her money, so you're counterproductive if you try to suppress such things.

Hilton Kramer: Well, I've never seen Karen Finley, I've never written about her, I hope never to see her, so I plead not guilty.

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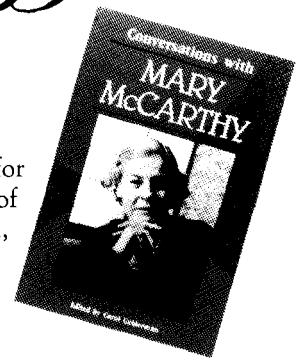

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The Changing Curriculum: Then and Now

William Phillips: In this session the subject is "The Changing Curriculum: Then and Now," and the main presentation will be made by Edith Kurzweil. She is Executive Editor of *Partisan Review* and Chairman of the Department of Sociology at Rutgers University, Newark, and the author, mainly, of two very interesting works: *The Age of Structuralism* and recently of *The Freudians:A Comparative Perspective*, a study of psychoanalysis in five countries. James Atlas will speak next. He is the author of a biography of Delmore Schwartz and very recently, just out, *The Book Wars*, a small book discussing the very subjects we are addressing at this conference. He is also one of the editors of the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* - I don't know whether he's going to give us a different version of *The New York Times* than Hilton. Roger Shattuck, Professor of Modern Foreign Languages at Boston University, will speak after James Atlas. He is the author of two important books, *Proust's Binoculars* and *The Banquet Years*, and he has written about many of the subjects we are discussing here. Edith, you go first.

Edith Kurzweil: As Roger Shattuck told me during lunch, I cover a lot of ground. So here it is.

For many years, Americans who keep up with *The New York Times* have known about what is taught in colleges and universities, about the sad state of language teaching in high schools, and about the deficiencies in mathematics. They learn about the S.A.T. scores and changes in these tests themselves, and about the most recent reading levels achieved by elementary and high school students. All this keeps the sorry state of our educational system in the public eye. As a result, everyone has his or her own pet solutions. But for the most part, these solutions address specific issues and further help discourage those teachers who try to "make a difference." In any event, most of the proffered solutions no longer question the assumptions that are underpinning them all. Nor do they manage to skirt the political ramifications of their remedies. For education has become politicized, and right and left ideologies impose their respectively regressive and utopian solutions, causing, as it were, a pendulum effect.

Clearly, we have come together not to praise but to examine what we might be able to do to save our schools; how we might better understand where not only our college curricula but our students'

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preparation for college got derailed. How and why, we ask, have we managed in spite of our good intentions to go wrong at almost every step? Why did we lose our way while fully believing that we were implementing our democratic ideals? What is it in our educational philosophy that militates against overall improvement in spite of the fact that countless studies and reports have ended up with recommendations for far-reaching remedies, many of which have been implemented. To get out of our internal and politicized discussions, I will try to step outside them and take a bird's eye view – by presenting the central controversial issues as openly, honestly, and fully as possible.

I will argue that American schools (on all levels) differ from European ones on the following ten points: 1) we are more apt to confuse aims of education with aims of integration – which play a role in every democratic society – without objectively analyzing who is educated and/or integrated; 2) when we do address this issue, we tend to superimpose political aims and ideals on pedagogic ones; 3) our curriculum is more open and flexible and thus more internally politicized than, for instance, the French or German one; 4) general indifference to history leads us to forget our educational history so that even our so-called experts can legitimately ignore the fact that some of their latest recommendations were tried in the past and did not work; 5) by pointing to inadequacies our Marxists propose revolutionary transformations while our conservatives hark back to a utopian past, and thereby the politicization of even the most peripheral issues is boosted; 6) both Marxists and conservatives underestimate the fact that most Americans are interested in education as the means to economic ends rather than in right or left ideology; 7) everyone is agreed that advanced industrial, postmodern or post-postmodern societies need educated citizens – where "educated" stands for more than literacy and numeracy – but no one agrees on how to achieve this goal; 8) we frequently overemphasize economic questions over educational ones, although I do not mean to imply that we ought to ignore inequities of funding; 9) periodically, Americans discuss the relationship between the low levels of teachers' salaries (often collapsing every category from kindergarten through graduate school) and student learning – assuming too simple an equation between financial input and learning output; 10) administrative offices, instituted in good faith to enforce federal or state law, to compel students, teachers and other staff to be "accountable," or to run programs designed to counteract existing deficiences and overall social discrimination, have grown and multiplied – drowning us in paper and overadministration which ultimately not only may be too costly but also aggravate the problems they were meant to resolve.

Debates about the above ten points range from the most abstract

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and theoretical to the most personal and nonobjective. While a sufficient level of generality may allow us to take the high road and to avoid controversial subjects, nostalgia may lead us to glorify the good old days when teachers taught and students learned, when education to some extent did perpetuate our melting pot ideology, and when the Judeo-Christian/Protestant ethic was pervasive in both schools and homes. I will try to avoid both traps by illustrating my theoretical points with (admittedly extreme) examples and a bit of reminiscence.

"Less than half the city's elementary schoolchildren read at or above their grade level, according to test results released today by the Board of Education," reported Jane Furse on July 2, 1990 in *The New York Post*. She went on to recount that over forty-eight percent of third- to tenth-graders scored at or above their grade level, that second-graders showed the greatest improvement and ninth and tenth-graders the largest decline. "Compared to the rest of the nation," she said, "New York City's performance remains within five points of the national average, but 20 out of the city's 32 districts scored below national average" – conditions Chancellor Fernandez is planning 'to improve by starting to address the problems in earlier grades.'" No mention of how he expects to proceed, or that the national average has been dropping steadily.

During the month of May, New Yorkers were reading about yet another problem – the disturbances at John Jay College. These had been resolved, but on June 30th, in an "Open letter to Chancellor Murphy," *The New York Post* printed a letter from a "Minority student at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice" denouncing the protests by his fellow students:

> When I arrived at school on May 10, 1990, I was relieved to hear that . . . the criminals who'd attempted to seize control of the North Hall . . . had been arrested and ejected. Later that day, however, my relief gave way to disgust. A multi-million dollar complex was surrendered simply to a small group of criminals.

This student went on to argue that the protesters were depriving students like himself – who work to pay for their own education, to keep up "decent GPAs" – of their schooling. He lampooned the claims that CUNY proficiency exams and tuition are racist tools and that racism is inherent in the administration of CUNY. Instead, he went on:

> Some believe your approach is guided by your own Marxist-inspired ideology. Others think, as I do, that your actions are guided primarily by the politics of the moment: You perceive a need to avoid any

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> confrontation which might be portrayed in racial terms. Thus students who are black will not be punished no matter what they do. White students are a different matter.

And he concluded that such decisions, by the Chancellor, the Board of Trustees and the Mayor ultimately will lead the members of the Quiet Majority – among whom he counts himself – to go elsewhere, "before standards decline to the point where a CUNY diploma makes them a joke in the employment market." I wonder, however, where else he could go, given the high cost of tuition.

The New York Times also reported the reading scores of school children; but it tends not to feature (or to receive?) letters by the "Quiet Majority." And, precisely because this constitutency remains quiet, we are inclined to ignore it. But we read similar pleas in articles by, for instance, such black scholars as Glen Loury and Thomas Sowell, whom the "Militant Minority" denounce as sell-outs and traitors to the cause. If, in fact, we were to keep in mind that the goals of education are manifold, that among them are exposure to as much learning as possible, preparation for productive lives, for independent thinking, and so on, then we might be able to focus on the pedagogical aims alone. Were we to do so, we might decide to raise our overall expectations – while providing remedial help for those who cannot keep up.

Beyond citing this angry letter which illustrates that we sometimes are prone to confusing academic achievement (however we define it) with racism (a more than serious though separate issue) we are giving in to the sort of political pressure that may end up – unintentionally – dividing our society rather than uniting it. This happened at John Jay College, and it goes on at campuses around the country. Instead of having the political and personal courage to face the motives for these outbursts, dealing with them logically and equitably in public debates, and separating political and social issues from educational ones, we tend to throw up our hands at the latest incident (each of them an occasion for media hype and manipulated to elevate ratings) and, depending upon our political stance, conclude that the country has become reactionary and Reaganite or is about to fall apart. Thus we get caught up in yet another campaign meant to eradicate racism, are served more rhetoric on the virtues of voluntarism, or decide to ban "racist" remarks legally. In the process, whatever side we are on, we claim to be defending free speech and the liberties of our "underclass" while, in fact, abdicating our responsibilities to the lawyers and helping in the dismantling of a formerly adequate public educational system – open to all the impecunious for whom CUNY used to be the way into the middle class.

I am a product of that system, having come to America at the end

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of 1940 as one of Hitler's refugees. After a traumatic escape to Belgium on a children's transport – where I perfected the French I had learned at school in Vienna – and another one through Southern France, Spain and Portugal, I got onto one of the last American ships to sail for New York. I had had one year of English in Brussels – which I foisted on the sailors who served tea, and on my two American cabin mates. They did not understand me, and I did not understand them. I tried to find out what they said with the help of a pocket dictionary and relied on my French.

Inevitably, the transition into English was upsetting, and I never figured out whether I underplayed it because it coincided with the reunion with my parents or because I took pride in being a fast learner. Teenagers then were no kinder than they are today: I was laughed at many times for misunderstanding and mispronouncing words, for my ignorance of soap operas; and I was told to go back where I came from when I dared convey to some of my classmates that the Nazis were barbarians, or that I preferred classical music to Frank Sinatra. I was expected to pick up English by myself – even though my parents continued to speak German at home and with their friends. Maybe I learned English in a hurry, because I had no choice. And if people were concerned about the shock I was suffering, they certainly didn't let on. I graduated from high school during the war, at seventeen, scored in the eighty-seventh percentile on the English Regents exam, and entered City College as an evening student.

Hindsight tells me that bilingual classes would have handicapped me. Maybe I would have been better off psychologically, would have eased into America more comfortably among fellow emigrants, with the help of bilingual education. In effect, my wave of emigrés, as documented by, for instance, Steven Lowenstein's *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, Lore Segal's *A Home of One's Own*, and Abraham Peck's *The German-Jewish Legacy in America, 1938 -1988*, from the very beginning formed the sort of voluntary organizations and the social clubs, which, as Tocqueville already noted, typically spring up in America. (I was introduced into the newly formed Austro-American Youth group a few months after my arrival by the daughter of parental friends, and this became my means of entering American adulthood.)

We all follow the battle around bilingual education. It has been raging for years and has been cast as a conflict between the good, compassionate people on the left and the unfeeling, reactionary ones on the right. But this polarized view does not sufficiently address the varying needs of students. In effect, bilingual education did expect to make up for some of the lacks in the home life of emigrants – certainly a worthwhile aim full of good intent. Still, it seems that by putting this sec-

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ondary aim up front we further overloaded our already strained educational system, and retarded the learning of English among the more gifted. If however, as some of the Hispanic Studies' people admit privately, bilingual education has failed, we cannot abandon it without also dismantling the bilingual bureaucracy we have built up over the the last two decades – of teachers, support staff and special associations and administrators. Were we to do so, we would be unfair to hundreds of thousands of people who, among other things, are the backbone of the populations we must move into the mainstream. Only frank discussion, and differentiation among Spanish-speaking youngsters – after immersing them into English, and short, intensive remedial help – could do away with bilingual curricula. Since this cannot be done without offering bilingual teachers other employment, we might turn this "liability" into a "virtue" by engaging them as foreign language teachers – thereby reintroducing the much-needed foreign language requirements, at every level. In cynical, political terms this is called "recycling" a strong and vocal interest group.

Simultaneously, we would have to convince our Hispanic population, along with all other minorities, that it pays to send their kids to schools that challenge them in order to learn to compete effectively. Were we successful, we even might achieve the de facto integration proscribed by our Constitution. But is this possible without yet another extended media campaign – and political name-calling? Do we have the courageous individuals to take on such a battle? I know of instructors, including myself, who have discussed these issues openly – honestly and carefully – in integrated classrooms and in seminars. But to reach even half of a class of forty-five students and a handful of colleagues, though helpful, does not win a battle. Such a battle, to make for substantial change, must be waged at the national level. At that point, however, the problem no longer is in the hands of educators but of Congress, and becomes a political football, subject to lobbying and media blitz, and to the customary drawbacks of centralized legislation: we end up with a political platform, assuming we can agree on academic content. (The question of content will be discussed at our session on the so-called canon.)

When Tocqueville visited America, in 1830, however, he found that "in the United States the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of the democratic republic; [and] . . . the instruction which enlightens understanding is not separated from the moral education which amends the heart." What happened in the interim to subvert this process? Now, Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, blames the "top-heavy, rule-bound, and inefficient bureaucracy," Chancellor Murphy "the disenfranchisement

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of the poor who are cut off from the democratic process." While both are correct, and are pointing to specific and serious problems which our society must address, they are bowing also to what they think their major constituencies want to hear. Educators, however, must attempt to discuss the obstacles in depth lest these continue to subvert the very educational principles Tocqueville admired. To do so would help also to develop what William James referred to as "the critical sense."

In July 1990, in *Commentary*, Abigail Thernstrom, who writes on affirmative action, in her essay "The Scarcity of Black Professors," concluded that the only thing universities and colleges can do to increase the pitifully small pool of candidates is "to get involved in education at the level at which it really counts for black students . . . [by] linking up with high schools, tutoring inner-city students, and running special summer programs." She thought that Boston University's agenda for the Chelsea public school system, which includes "adult literacy training, seminars on parenting, classes for teenage mothers to teach life-coping skills, and prenatal health care . . . – all of which will help students come to school ready to learn – are the only rays of hope in a largely bleak scene." In other words, she suggests that we must tackle social and learning problems before we can expect to make major leaps in public higher education.

A colleague teaching anthropology, though coming to the problem from an entirely different perspective, last spring sent me the following note:

> I have just finished grading the mid-terms from my two introductory sections and have reached the sad conclusion that a majority of the students, seniors as well as freshmen, would not be admitted to one of the better private preparatory schools. It is especially discouraging because so many of them have obviously worked very hard to do well but clearly were never trained in basic analytic and writing skills. I'm not sure what can be done about the sorry state of American education but surely our students have not been well served in the past.

Clearly, the Chelsea program is radical: it got off the ground over the objections of the school board, parental groups and teachers, and because the only thing everyone agreed on was the fact that conditions were at an all-time low. As we know, the situation in Newark, New Brunswick, Detroit, New York, and other "inner cities" is similar. Even to discuss a Chelsea-type solution we would need local equivalents of John Silber, willing literally to fight City Hall and entrenched interest groups – teachers, administrators, local politicians – with the necessary clout and access to funds. Moreover, measurable results will come slowly

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whereas critics will not wait to pounce. And, as usual, they will not mention that excellent and dedicated teachers and administrators continue to be discouraged and are leaving, and that nonminority students are as badly served as minorities.

The Spring 1990 issue of *Daedalus* on "Literacy in America" thoroughly went into all these matters, though on an academic level. In the lead article David Hawkins demonstrates that early schooling through the age of twelve prefigures later learning, and that this can be done only in lively classrooms – with books in one corner, graphs and maps on walls, corners for painting, woodwork, puzzles, and more. He decries the fact that there are too few such classrooms around the country, but ignores the fact that many children no longer come to learn but to spend time or to socialize; and that even dedicated teachers need to have their commitment reinforced by at least a modicum of success. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in another article, points out that not wanting to learn is the chief impediment to literacy and that, therefore, students must be shown the advantages they may reap from reading, writing and arithmetic, and the enjoyment. How come the people Tocqueville observed were aware of these advantages and of banding together? What occurred to reverse these trends? Conservatives tend to blame "the family," but overlook that families come in many ranges, classes and sizes, and that their problems are even more diverse than those of the educational system. Radicals such as Bowles and Gintis maintain in *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) that education replaced the dream of the frontier as the means to escape poverty, the dismal factories, the crowded Eastern cities.

Bowles and Gintis argue that the closing of the Western frontier toward the end of the nineteenth century and the growing conflicts within the "factory system" revitalized the folklore of capitalism by rapidly expanding educational opportunities; that those who did not manage to climb up the educational ladder were led to believe they had only themselves to blame; and that, instead, the system "provided an admirable safety valve for the economic pressure cooker" – at a time when more and more people went on to college. In the process, these authors continue, the homogeneous cast of colleges gave way to a hierarchy with Ivy League schools at the top; and that by 1968 more high school graduates – minorities, women, welfare recipients, students and workers – dropped out, discontented with economic inequality, and joined social movements. These movements' success was short-lived, continue Bowles and Gintis, because such studies as the Coleman Report, Jencks' *Inequality* and Arthur Jensen's argument for the inheritability of I.Q. paved the way for a backlash.

To counteract this backlash, Bowles and Gintis argued that

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"educational policy in the United States is severely limited by the role of schooling in the production of an adequate labor force in a hierarchically controlled and class-stratified production system." Their solution is a move towards socialism, towards "a revolutionary transformation of social life." Their opponents go to the other extreme by blaming the radicals alone for our current educational mess. By institutionalizing the reforms which the 1960s and 1970s students demanded, they argue, Congress and the courts have brought about the current crisis. The revolutionary movements, they maintain, unhinged former programs, and with each success new left students – with the help of junior and other radical faculty – demanded and usually succeeded in reducing academic requirements a bit more. As a result of the ensuing confusion between political activism and educational achievement more unprepared students – not only minorities and blacks but "ethnic whites" – who previously had not aspired to enter college did in fact do so.

If at that time the necessary remedial help had been provided and temporary "streaming" had not been outlawed as "elitist," the open door policy not only might have worked but might have hastened democratization. As it was, many students flunked out, blaming racism, prejudice and bad teaching rather than lack of preparation, of intellectual interest, or the fact that the university had become the preferred turf from which to revolutionize the society. For instance, teachers were hired to provide role models – a good idea at the time – but no one kept track of the role models' performance. Recently, Julius Lester noted:

> If Frederick Douglass had waited for a black role model, he would have remained in slavery. If W. E. B. Du Bois had waited for a black role model, he would have never left Great Barrington, Massachusetts. There was a time in American black history when parents held up whites as appropriate role models for their children, telling them, "You can not only do what he does, you can do better! (*The New Republic*, July 2, 1990).

Indeed, might Newark's children not learn something from dedicated Hispanic or white teachers as well as from black ones? And might others not be inspired by such black school principals as I met at a roundtable discussion in Newark? The worst thing we can do, I believe, is to elevate issues of identification with one's race above learning, because this helps only to perpetuate the inequality we expect to alleviate. Yes, former Chancellor Murphy is correct, poverty and substandard education do go together. But some very poor children do learn, and it is our job to see that more of them do. To treat students as equals means

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also to demand the same performance of every ethnic minority and majority which, in turn, will provide everyone with the same tools they need to feel competent.

Instead of comparing American and European educational systems abstractly, I will cite a few instances of curricular requirements to demonstrate the slippage of academic and intellectual content. To take an extreme example, Kafka entered the German Gymnasium in Prague in 1893, at the age of ten, together with another eighty-three boys. During the first two years they had eight hours of Latin and much extra homework in that language, including copying and memorizing model sentences. The boys were expected to record their observations of life around them, and were to use the German language with "simplicity, clarity, accuracy and specificity." During the first year they learned to analyze model sentences and were given exercises in style, spent time on grammar and syntax. In addition, Czech and math were obligatory, while music, art and physical training were optional. Greek was introduced in the third year, and it was understood that learning a language meant understanding its history and civilization.

A similar curriculum prevailed in the Viennese Gymnasium (private but controlled by the state, at low or no cost) I attended in the late 1930s. By then modern languages could replace Greek, and sometimes even Latin. In spite of some variations, the Lyceé in Brussels, and the French system, had equivalent programs. I should add, however, that all pupils were required to take tests at the end of fourth grade and would be "streamed," and that no more than twenty-five percent would make it into the academic course. And only twenty-four of the eighty-four in Kafka's class passed the Abitur eight years later. It stands to reason that if we were to have a similar system – which assumes a normal distribution of groups of origin – some of these graduates would be minorities.

When I entered City College we had the following B. A. requirements: four years in a first foreign language, two years in a second one; one year each in biology, American history, European history, art history, music appreciation; introductory courses in physics, chemistry, sociology, philosophy, psychology, economics; four courses in English and four in speech (remedial speech for foreigners without credit before that). In fact speech, art, and music courses allowed one or two credits but met for at least three hours. All these courses put together were our Introduction to Civilization – most of it Western, but others were thrown in if the instructor chose to do so. I remember reading some Confucius and Mao as well as Buddhism and parts of the Old and New Testaments – though I never took a course in religion. No one ever thought of a canon because we were eager to learn and assumed that the faculty knew what materials we ought to be exposed to. If

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professors had pet subjects that might be compared to a canon, we were presented with too many different views even to think of indoctrination; and we were encouraged to debate, to question whatever we had read.

Thus I am sad for my students who miss all the intellectual excitement I was privvy to, which I could taste when I chose to. I do not mean to imply that I was less eager to get easy credits. Actually, I was annoyed to be excused from basic German and French courses and put into advanced ones – without getting credit for what I already knew.

I continued at Queens College in the late 1950s, when, as Bowles and Gintis note, already a third of the age group was entering college. But even if there was a master plan behind what they call an "economic pressure cooker," did the alleged implementation of this plan mandate the relentless watering down of educational content? Is that why, by then, I would have gotten some credit for courses I could pass without having attended them, or was it an extension of the G. I. Bill? In any case, however gradually, college courses came to replace subject matter that used to be taught in high school, and we started to give credit for life experience.

By 1968, as the students in French universities were revolting against the move from philosophical, academic subjects to technical, job-related ones, our students were striking to abolish all requirements. Since the students won in both countries, though less so in France than in America, should we really be surprised that our workforce is inferior to the French one, or to that in every other developed country? And that this is one of the reasons jobs for the very people who need them most are moving abroad? (To get into this issue, however, would take us too far afield.) But more important is the fact that, as William James would say, our educational system no longer cultivates judgment.

Another issue, of course, which has contributed to problems in the university is the division into departments. Because all of us receive degrees in a specific discipline, and have to publish in that field if we want to get tenure and other promotions, we ultimately get to be professionalized. On our campuses, then, we end up being members of departments, able to discuss with no more than a very few colleagues the intellectual issues that preoccupy us. Committee work, teaching, reading papers, administration, all of them keep us on tenterhooks. Bruce Wilshire, a philosopher, in *The Moral Collapse of the University*, argues that we cannot deliver education, only instruction, that at best we can stimulate somebody to ask "What am I going to make of myself?" We rarely ask, he goes on, what is it to be an educated human being – in a university that drives ever faster under its own momentum, and where human concerns are swept out the door.

To counteract this trend, and the increasing feeling of isolation, we

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started to organize interdisciplinary seminars and programs. It may well be that the fragmentation and isolation into faculties facilitated the acceptance of some of the new theories – most of them imported from France – precisely because they transcend our customary disciplines.

As you know, deconstructionist and postdeconstructionist theories have been taking hold. William Phillips has spoken of their current shape and of postmodernism and its variety of post-ist phenomena. I will address this topic only to the extent that it influences college curricula.

I have indicated that we have systematically simplified our course offerings, have catered to student demands for "relevant" subjects, and in the process have reduced the length of reading lists and written requirements. Thus I wonder how the rather esoteric new theories fit in – in view of the difficult language and complex approaches to texts; how compatible they are with the increasingly easy subject matter students study in other courses.

You have heard that these theories relativize, are nihilistic, and point out that every position, even the most intellectual, ultimately is subjective; that, by implication, we never can state anything that is true because as soon as we say it its context has changed; that, therefore, we always act in line with self-interest, however unconsciously we may do so.

You know also that many of the proponents of these theories "deconstruct" texts in order to expose the subversive content even its authors were unaware of – from the inequities of capitalism to racism and from homophobic to sexist biases; that one of their aims is to revolutionize society. These theorists expect to do so in a language and on a theoretical level which, as I have noted, is more and more out of the reach of all but the best students; and they remain on what Marx called the superstructural level.

I too like to theorize. A few years ago, I even was elected Chair of the Theory Section of the American Sociological Association. But it would be disingenuous of me to claim that my interest in abstraction is related to my equally strong interest in achieving political equality for all, that it could energize a liberation movement. That is why I question the sincerity of this entire enterprise. Many of its proponents, and I am not including such people as Derrida, pretend to be all-knowing, claim to understand something that escapes ordinary people, and have isolated themselves as the bearers of a new truth. Thus I am wondering whether the new theorists can possibly reach the students they hope to revolutionize: only those attracted to abstractions enroll in these courses, so that they get separated from the others. Thereby the purported anti-elitist theorizers turn into a *de facto* elite. This is not to deny the desirability of a critical stance that aims at questioning everything that is taken for

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granted. I am objecting only to turning this method into an esoteric, jargon-ridden enterprise which ends up cheating the students it claims to represent.

Perhaps my own early European upbringing, in a rigid elementary school and by a middle-class family, may not make for a valid comparison. Perhaps I was not a typical student – possibly compensating for my feelings of displacement by trying to excel at school. However, if we accept as I do that ability to learn is more or less evenly distributed across racial divides, that role models can be found across these divides as well (I, for instance, wanted to be as outspoken as Eleanor Roosevelt, as svelte as my black classmate in Brussels, and as cute as Shirley Temple), and that good work habits must be learned (I didn't acquire them until ten or fifteen years ago) then we can generalize from my experiences. If we do, we must conclude that even though in the 1960s it was important to open the doors forcibly to the disadvantaged, we have gone about this task in the wrong way.

To rectify matters we must change course. Affirmative action never was meant to abolish standards – of what we teach, of how we grade. Nor was it meant to have us furnish cumbersome accountability statistics to governmental agencies – about the numbers of blacks, whites, Hispanics, etc. we interviewed or have hired. To me, these forms are too reminiscent of the employment forms I had to fill out during World War II: whether I checked off Jewish or none in the box on "religion," I would be told that the position was filled. Many of the current directives, instead of promoting the liberal ideals we cherish, it seems to me, end up by helping to destroy them. By failing to make distinctions, by agreeing – often correctly – that our system discriminates, we may end up, for instance, allowing a hoax such as the "rape" of Tawana Brawley to be equated to the rape of the Central Park jogger; or we may judge every murder in terms of race rather than criminality. Instead of discussing the problems with our students in these terms we might want to debate issues of honesty and integrity, to help replace and to combat cynicism and anarchy – and thus nurture their critical faculties. Only by example, hard work, and cooperation, rather than invective and politicization of the academy, will it be possible to truly integrate our many minorities – with the help of general education rather than with esoteric theories or with role models alone. What we need to do, and what few among us are willing to do, is to begin by teaching basic skills and in the process to address the philosophical questions crucial to a democratic society. Thereby our students gradually will realize that they do have choices. And we will elevate the best among them to our own level.

William Phillips: Thank you Edith. James Atlas.

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James Atlas: Edith Kurzweil's account of the crisis in American education is so temperate and sensible that it tempts one to simply agree with her conclusions and wonder why the solutions she proposes can't be implemented without further fuss. Why not "debate issues of honesty and integrity" instead of foisting our own political agendas on undergraduates who aren't sophisticated enough to understand the conflict? Why not "address the philosophical questions crucial to a democratic society"? As a journalist and literary bystander, observing these issues from a disinterested position on the sidelines, I was impressed with Kurzweil's moderate tone. She has resisted the polemical approaches of both left and right – the left that has imposed on the humanities an elaborate and highly specialized critical rhetoric over the last two decades, turning the study of literature into an esoteric pseudoscience; the right that has interpreted every new development in the curriculum as an assault on Western civilization. If only one *could* occupy some middle ground, relying on "hard work and cooperation" to sort out these issues!

But it seems to me that things have gone too far. We are rapidly moving away from the disposition to negotiate that is supposedly a characteristic of democratic societies. I was moved by Kurzweil's portrait of her own education – moved because it evokes a world that no longer exists. Not only Kafka's gymnasium in Prague, not only Kurzweil's gymnasium in Vienna, but even the City College of forty or fifty years ago, seem infinitely remote in time. The idea, or perhaps I should say *ideal*, of education these institutions embodied has become virtually obsolete, unrecognizable to anyone but assiduous readers of memoirs. It's not only a matter of the books students were expected to read or the languages they were expected to learn. The basic premise of the old-fashioned pedagogy that Kurzweil describes – that a body of knowledge existed and that it was the business of education to make students familiar with it – can no longer be asserted with any confidence. To identify a syllabus now as "An Introduction to Civilization" is to make a political statement: What do we mean by "civilization"? Isn't "civilization" a loaded term that refers to the achievements of a largely white male elite? Whose civilization is it, anyway?

I am neither a left-wing academic nor a neoconservative, but I have found myself drawn to this debate for the same reasons, I suspect, as Edith Kurzweil. Education was very precious to her, and by education, I don't mean simply what she learned in colleges and universities. Her aspiration, she makes it clear, was to become assimilated; the New World, for better or for worse, was the one in which she would establish and define herself. And mastering the essence of our culture, I take it, was the means by which this self-definition would be accomplished.

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"Biology, American history, European history, art history, music appreciation, physics, chemistry, sociology, philosophy, psychology, economics, English, speech" – to acquire some familiarity with these subjects was to know, more or less, what an educated person should know. "No one ever thought of a canon," says Kurzweil; this doesn't mean there was no canon, only that the canon wasn't a political issue. We read the books we were assigned, the books that generations before us had read.

How innocent, how pastoral that era must seem to us now, when students are taught that "literature" is not what we thought it was – the Five-Foot Shelf, "the best that has been thought and said" – but a battleground over which every conceivable issue is fought. Feminists address themselves to questions of gender, social constructionists to power, how the works that we consider classics reflect the social and economic arrangements of their day. (Where have I heard all this before? In the debate over socialist realism that filled the pages of *Partisan Review* half a century ago.) Western literature is an instrument of oppression; the predominance in the syllabus of dead white males is proof that the deck is stacked against women and minorities. Any attempt to discriminate, to ascribe a universal value to certain works that have survived the depredations of time is to be guilty of "privileging," to award them a special status within the culture simply because they're alleged to represent the experience of that culture's dominant class. Kurzweil wonders "how the rather esoteric new theories fit in" with the demands for "relevant" courses that have become front-page news at Stanford and elsewhere over the last few years. The answer is that they are simply a more sophisticated expression of those demands – an academic way of making a polemical point. The classics are all about the classes. We have come a long way indeed from Lionel Trilling's conviction that "the best citizen is the person who has learned from the great minds and souls of the past how beautiful reason and virtue are and how difficult to attain."

Why is the curriculum debate so crucial to the future of our society? There's a connection between what transpires in college English departments and educational policies that will effect a whole generation of Americans. "One way or another," writes Chester Finn, the former Assistant Secretary of Education, in a recent article entitled "Narcissus Goes to School," "every significant development in higher education eventually echoes in the elementary-secondary system." Anyone familiar with the "Curriculum of Inclusion" can attest to the truth of this observation. The task force appointed by New York State Commissioner of Education Thomas Sobol came out with a report that argued "African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression," and proposed as a remedy the adoption of a new curriculum that

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would seek to correct this perceived imbalance by stressing their contributions to the culture. The Board of Regents voted unanimously to adopt its findings, and the drafting of a revised, or should I say revisionist, curriculum for New York City schools is under way.

Is this a good idea? The minority student at John Jay College whose irate letter Kurzweil quotes would be grateful to get on with his education, not to receive special treatment as a minority, in other words to have the same opportunities she had. He resents the craven administrators who give in to the demands of a vocal minority. He would like a chance (if I may put it in this old-fashioned way) to compete, to claim, through the study of our culture and its achievements, a place of his own within its borders. He doesn't wish to be perceived as a victim. He wants to get his degree.

Kurzweil's advice on how to remedy the situation on our campuses and in our schools is reassuringly level-headed. "Only by example, hard work, and cooperation, rather than invective and politicization of the academy will it be possible to truly integrate our many minorities," she concludes. But I must say that I feel uneasy about the prospects of this scenario happening now. To be sure, there will always be students, from every ethnic group, who hunger for the kind of education that Edith Kurzweil imbibed out of cultural instinct. But the climate has worsened in the last few years, both in the universities and in the streets. Living in New York City, I wonder if it isn't a luxury to discuss among ourselves what students ought to be taught, what books they ought to read. In many inner-city schools, they're not learning anything at all. We're on the verge of a new barbarism, evident not only in the erosion of consensus about what students ought to know, but in the erosion of what they know. Sinking achievement scores, freshman composition courses designed to rehabilitate a generation that is barely literate – these troubling phenomena have been well-documented. The basic message of E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Illiteracy* is that students are no longer familiar with even the rudiments of their own history – especially disadvantaged students. The disaffection of these students from contemporary American life – the fact that they have no stake in it – gives a utopian ring to Kurzweil's suggestion that we "address the philosophical issues crucial to a democratic society." Put bluntly, high school students ignorant of what a democracy is won't abide by its laws. "Teaching basic skills" is what we must do now, the same skills that we've always taught and with the same end in mind. To some extent, the problems we face are beyond the reach of intellectuals or teachers or administrators; until we deal with the underclass that we've created, I don't see a way out of the predicament in which we find ourselves.

The fact is, we are going in the wrong direction. When I read on

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the front page of *The New York Times* about a public high school teacher in Indianapolis who is teaching her students that Africans had sailed to the Americas two thousand years before "anyone ever heard of Columbus"; that African people were "the first to show genius in art and architecture"; even that it was a black man who had "drawn up the plans for Bell's telephones," I feel a despair that borders on rage. What can this so-called "Afrocentrist approach" contribute to the welfare of black students? A nation where blacks are isolated in special schools, as they are now in Milwaukee, is a nation estranged from the idea that it is a nation. Education isn't "a form of therapy," as Arthur Schlesinger put it with some acerbity; its purpose isn't to improve students' self-esteem. It has no mandate to redress social injustice – only to teach that it exists. What Robert Lowell said in defense of his experiments in self-history applies to all history: "Why not say what really happened?" At the very least, we could offer this disenfranchised class the same opportunities we had ourselves and our parents and grandparents before us – the chance to become Americans. Only when they are taught the story of our common heritage, taught that there *is* a common heritage, will we have the luxury of debating what it means.

William Phillips: Thank you. Roger Shattuck

Roger Shattuck: In her bird's eye comparison of American and European education. Edith Kurzweil does not try to drive home one major point or to mount a sustained argument. Along the way I find myself agreeing with many of her observations. Her telling remarks on bilingual education and on affirmative action do not offend my weathered liberal impulses. Yes, we must not simply maintain standards: we must reinvent them. A high school diploma should be attested by an appropriate set of examinations. I would go further and higher. How can we call an uncoordinated collection of courses in one college department "a major" or "a concentration" on the strength of which to confer a degree? We cannot, yet we do. And we shrink from acknowledging the fundamental situation that defines higher education. College admissions offices now run the whole show. Their favorable decision certifies success in high school. They dictate to compliant professors that students admitted to college are qualified for further education, virtually entitled to a degree, and should therefore pass and graduate. This tacit policy serves the immediate economic needs of the institution, not the interests of the besieged society or of individual students.

Kurzweil also deplores "the division into departments." Yet how else can we carry the load of enrollments we have foolishly, since the sixties, tried to carry? The crucial error lies in how we deal with this

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ramification of specialities. By accepting all departments as equal, we have shirked the responsibility of maintaining intellectual priority. No student should undertake extended work in sociology, psychology, economics, or political science until well grounded in history and geography, science and mathematics, literature and languages, and history of philosophy. In my experience, any well-trained and intelligent sociologist or political scientist would agree. An institution that leaves such choices to students has abdicated its claim to represent learning.

On her opening page, Kurzweil raises a stern finger: " . . . most of the proffered solutions no longer question the assumptions that are underpinning them all." On the strength of that statement I shall choose two assumptions of her paper to examine.

The first assumption crops up almost at the end. While criticizing the esoteric abstraction of much current theory in the humanities and social sciences, Kurzweil protects her flank with the following sentence: "This is not to deny the desirability of a critical stance that aims at questioning everything that is taken for granted."

The higher one ventures in the work of intellect, the more tense becomes the relation between faith and doubt. If either term devours the other entirely, then I believe we have lost our way. Yes, we should be ready to question in private, in the classroom, and in publication, even articles of faith like the sacredness of all human life, the rule of law for all, democracy, the separation of powers, the role of the family, and more. Even more important, we should also be willing to question the assumption that anything taken for granted must, for that very reason, be "called into question." That tiresome cant phrase, "to call into question," usually means not to inquire into something but to dismiss it as established and, therefore, fraudulent. We would do well to alert our students to these instances of higher conformity.

I must repeat here what I have said elsewhere. In addition to their gadfly role, schools and colleges represent primarily the gonads of a culture, the stable element of continuity in an organism that will first resist change and then slowly respond to the shocks of history and to challenges from within and without. In a healthy society the conservative function of an education stands prior to its innovative function. The forces in our culture that favor change for its own sake—media, the free market, fashion, publicity—have become very powerful. I am not preaching in favor of conformism against imagination. Yes, we may question everything, but not before we teachers have received and given as faithful an account as possible of how things have come to be as they are. That accounting may be difficult and in some circumstances require great courage.

In her paper Kurzweil does not explicity raise the second assump-

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tion I wish to discuss. Yet she is aware of it, and it reaches very far and very deep in our discussions. What luck to discover that my work has been done for me by a journalist writing recently in *The Chronicle of Higher and Higher Education*. I have but to read from his article, "Clearwater President Defends Field":

> In his keynote address before the AACU (American Association of Colleges and Universities) President Callahan Picthall of Clearwater College slammed critics of higher education. He was leading off a forum on the subject, "The Changing Culture of the University." Picthall gave statistics on growing student enrollments, increasing budgets, and new degree programs in fields like media entertainment, business management, the creative arts, and the service trades. Federal and state governments and the courts turn to professors for expertise. Most book reviews and many important magazine articles come from college faculties. Higher education almost has a monopoly on the culture, Picthall stated. It is keeping our pluralist society alive. Even the cosmopolitan bohemia of artists, intellectuals, and revolutionaries has been coopted by campuses. "There is ample evidence," Picthall affirmed, "to justify the claim that the college-university model or multiversity represents the most successful and innovative democratic institution since the Constitution established our government. The 19th-century challenge of the frontier has been replaced by the 20th-century challenge of higher education. We no longer tell our young people to "go West." We tell them to "go to college."
>
> Picthall believed that we should give credit where credit is due. "This country has developed a remarkable educational system that is being imitated all over the world. Our colleges serve the crucial function of socializing the young – a function referred to as 'rites of passage' in primitive societies – while at the same time introducing them to the life of the mind." Picthall contended that higher education plays a dominant role in every aspect of everyone's life, from theology to prices to rubbish disposal. And it costs only an average of $11,000 per year to support a student in college. That is more than in any other country perhaps, but represents money better spent in the long run than on the homeless or on space research. The finest minds in the land can be found on our campuses, doing their research and meeting their classes.
>
> Picthall said that there is no reason to talk now about transferring funds and resources from higher to "lower" education. Colleges are in no way responsible for the decline in SAT scores, dropouts, and underperformance. We must build on our successes, not deny them or undermine them. Our goal, in order to become a truly educated country, should be to have not fifty percent, but seventy-five percent of the young attend college. All kinds of new fields, like fashion modelling, heavy equipment operating and food preparation, will

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find their proper place in degree programs.

Picthall revealed in an aside that he is now consulting for a major university on the coast about a two- to three-year degree beyond the doctorate in certain highly theoretical and technical fields like semiotics and iconoclastics. The degree will be called a Protectorate, for Protector of the Pinnacle of Knowledge. And of course to match the Protectorate we would need a new rank higher than Chaired Professor. Picthall had proposed Enthroned Professor, a rank which would come with attached Research Center, private dining room, public relations staff, and official residence.

In closing, Picthall urged his colleagues in the AACU to use all their experience and imagination to continue building American higher education, perhaps the most successful institutional creation of the twentieth century in any part of the world.

During the discussion period, following his address, after a few inaudible questions about Picthall's statistics, an unidentified woman at the back of the auditorium asked "Do you believe higher education deserves a virtual monopoly on everything we learn and think? In that case what do you propose that students do in school for twelve years of their life? Or are you suggesting that colleges should simply get it all over with and start admitting first graders?" Picthall replied that the questioner had misunderstood him. Schools definitely have their role. But it should not interfere with the great social and intellectual successes attained by our flourishing institutions of higher learning.

The final question was asked by Increase Rolandson, a middle school teacher from Plymouth, Massachusetts. He said that in the complex field of education and mental development we can be sure of very few things. One of them, however, is that what happens to a child before the age of twelve (at the latest) provides the most crucial influences on the child's moral, intellectual, emotional, and physical development. How could Dr. Picthall's recommendations about higher education be reconciled with that circumstance?

Dr. Picthall replied that the question was not addressed to his subject, or to the subject of the forum.

A panel of educators and public servants was scheduled to continue the discussion in the afternoon.

William Phillips: Well, there seems to be a lot of agreement on this panel. Do you want to comment on the commentators, Edith?

Edith Kurzweil: No, let's go on.

William Phillips: Okay, let's see if we can generate some disagreements.

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Roger Kimball: I agree with most of what Jim Atlas had to say, although I'd be curious to know if he could give me some examples of a neoconservative attack on higher education that held any innovation to be an assault on the Western tradition. I think I'm very familiar with those attacks and can't think of a single example, but perhaps you know of some.

James Atlas: Well, I was simply thinking in a very general sense of Allan Bloom's argument, which in a way started all this. I happen to admire much of what's in Bloom's book and think it's a kind of polemical masterpiece in the manner of Swift in some ways. But I do think that his aspiration for a culture constituted of a happy few reading the great works of the Western tradition is utopian.

Roger Kimball: Well, that sort of answers my question. I think Allan Bloom would be very unhappy to be identified as a neoconservative; after all, he disclaims the title explicitly in his new collection of essays.

James Atlas: Could you clarify that for me? I'm not sure he would be unhappy.

Gerald Kramer: I made a few notes I may want to read. Unlike most of you here I'm just a lay spectator, an amateur reader of all those wonderful journals and books for which you all write. I must say that unfortunately I find myself not particularly enlightened. You ended with questions, not answers. Everyone seems to take a myopic position, but people in general, and students in particular, are not one-dimensional. For example. I have a son who went through four years of a very rigid, classical prep-school education, who learned Russian and Greek, who had four years of English and history, and then became president of his college class wearing ankle-length hair. He shut out the administration and turned to radicalism, after that conservative education. Later he swallowed the neoconservative ethic and now is a writer and producer for prime-time television. I don't think that's a one-dimensional person.

Also, even intellectuals, such as yourselves, I must say, have feet of clay. I have an inborn cynicism about all self-righteous intellectuals from the right or the left. I agree with Orwell who said that all saints should be considered sinners until proven otherwise. I was terribly embarrassed about a year or so ago when I went to a debate between Allan Bloom and Henry Rosovsky from Harvard, when after the debate a young black student got up and asked an innocent question of Allan Bloom. He gave that student an intellectual tongue-lashing in front of the entire audience. This is a man of the humanities who showed his lack of humanity. Thank

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you very much.

Edith Kurzweil: I'm not surprised you didn't get enlightened, that you didn't get answers. I think that there are many questions we don't have answers to, no one does. We're here to discuss these questions; we want to come as close to good answers as we possibly can. We do not consider ourselves all-knowing, because if we did we wouldn't have to have magazines, we wouldn't have to have meetings. We would just dispense our knowledge, whatever it may be. And I don't think any of us gave the impression, either this morning or now, that all students are the same. We were really talking about a kind of drift; obviously there are certain trends, and there are backlashes to these trends. That's how we come to have all these extremes. Actually, Europeans, intellectuals and non-intellectuals both, ask: How come in America you always go to these extremes? How come you're not more balanced?

Gerald Kramer: I listened to that Colorado student who was a bit upset that you identified her as one-dimensional.

Edith Kurzweil: No one, I believe, meant it that way. Obviously, we all have all sorts of students.

James Atlas: One thing has occurred to me: I think that the lack of opposition is caused by the fact that the so-called opposition is not really represented on this panel. There was some discussion this morning about Barbara Herrnstein Smith's book, for instance, and I think the complexity of the debate has not been adequately represented because a book like hers - and other books advocating renovations in the curriculum - have a great deal in their favor. I don't feel that that position has been articulated.

William Phillips: Are you criticizing us?

James Atlas: Yes!

William Phillips: Oh, I just wanted to be sure. We don't mind criticism, but I think that you can carry the idea of representation of all points of view so far that you'll get a kind of hodge-podge. What we tried to do (and we were under pressure to get some kinds of representation rather than others) was to create a forum of what we consider to be intelligent disagreements. I personally feel if you started arguing with Barbara Herrnstein Smith about whether academics decide what the literary or intellectual tradition is, you'd all feel disappointed in

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that kind of conference. I may be wrong but that's my point of view.

James Atlas: Well, she's particularly unreasonable. Maybe she's not a good example.

Catharine Stimpson: I do think that that last exchange about the work of a distinguished scholar with very interesting ideas about the formation of ideas and about the nature of intellectual history has demeaned her. She is not here to speak for herself; there's no one representing her ideas on the panel (as Mr. Atlas has pointed out), and I really think if we want this debate to have the integrity and the intellectual honor that we claim we do, we should not make snide comments about people who are not here to speak for themselves.

William Phillips: I'd like to answer for a moment. Are you suggesting that we criticize only people who are here, that we can't criticize people who are not here? Do you object to criticizing Allan Bloom?

Catharine Stimpson: I think Allan Bloom is a very interesting thinker.

William Phillips: That wasn't my question. I asked if you objected to the criticism that has been made of Allan Bloom by several people.

Catharine Stimpson: Well, let me put it this way, Mr. Phillips. I had two critiques in my last comment. One was tone. The other was representation of the position that is being critiqued.

William Phillips: Who made those critiques?

James Atlas: I think I am guilty of having made a remark to the effect that Barbara Herrnstein Smith was unreasonable. Is that the problem? I'm sorry if I did. I meant to say that I found her book very challenging, and I have followed this debate now for several years. I found myself unwillingly drawn to hear out positions that I didn't think I would be drawn into. Her book is an example, Jane Tompkins' book is an example, of articulately representing the opposite case. That's the only point I was making, a point actually in her favor.

Hilton Kramer: I'm curious about the way this discussion is developing. I was really quite impressed by the fact that Catharine Stimpson, among the participants here, represented this so-called "missing voice" of academic orthodoxy today. And when it came to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's book, she was not willing to defend it. She was willing only to

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criticize people who she felt "demeaned" Barbara Herrnstein Smith by raising questions about the content of her work. If you believe in what she is doing, then articulate what she's doing to this audience. Either defend it or don't criticize on the grounds of tone.

William Phillips: Would you like to reply to that, Miss Stimpson?

Catharine Stimpson: I wouldn't mind, Mr. Phillips. Let me restate my position. There is no single academic orthodoxy on the so-called "left-liberal" side. This morning I think there were several very eloquent statements about the intellectual difficulty of collapsing the terms "left" and "liberal." There are also in literary theory today a great number of different positions about the meaning of deconstruction, about the nature of representation, and so on, and so forth. So it's a little odd (not to mention intellectually insufficient) to ask one person to represent an entire spectrum of conflicting and contestatory opinions. Mr. Kramer, I would have been delighted to give a one-paragraph defense or outline of what I think Barbara Herrnstein Smith is trying to do in *Contingencies of Value*. My intervention, however, was not to establish myself as the voice of authority about Barbara Herrnstein Smith, but if you'd like a paragraph seminar I'd be happy to do it. My intervention was to ask how we best conduct intellectual exchange. I for one feel that we best do this by treating our opponents' opinions with respect and by having a full range of representation of a series of complicated and often conflicting opinions.

In *Contingencies of Value*, Barbara Herrnstein Smith is trying to give a theory to be applied to a variety of historical periods about how judgments on esthetic values are formed and then reinforced. She is trying to give a set of ideas about the formation of value. She is very intrigued by "intellectual market forces." It's an interesting book. Barbara Herrnstein Smith is also a great expert on Shakespearean sonnets.

William Phillips: Would you object if I disagreed with your opinion of the book? And I don't see what's demeaning about my saying, for example, that I think one of her main points is that literary and intellectual tradition is formed within the academy, and that I think she is wrong. What is demeaning about that statement?

Catharine Stimpson: I don't think she is that monotonal.

William Phillips: Well, that's different. You disagree. But your disagreement with what I'm saying doesn't make what I say demeaning.

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Catharine Stimpson: No, I suggest that we're talking about different points in the sequence of events we have now gone over during the last several minutes. I think the tone was different and if I'm wrong I apologize to you.

William Phillips: Well, if I was demeaning I apologize.

Victoria Longino: I agree with Catharine Stimpson that the tone used about Barbara Herrnstein Smith was filled with contempt, which was not the same tone used to respond to Allan Bloom's ideas.

Doug Shafner: I'm a neophyte. I'm attracted to the subject matter here because I'm at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and am curious about higher education as a possible vocation for myself. I've been around for about twenty-five years, and if I want to teach I need a Masters degree. I'm taking a course in the documentary history of higher education, so I'm steeped somewhat in some of the philosophies of Charles Elliott and Francis Wayland and others. As an undergraduate I went to Brown University, which has been a focal point of change in the last thirty years of higher education. After I graduated, they radically changed their curriculum. I've become intellectually curious about the whole subject of curricula. But if I try to apply practical or non-ideological thinking to anything, there is a drift to cut me off from any kind of schooled critical thinking or debate; there is a presumption that everything has to come from some extraordinary liberal bias; and it is presumed that that is what reality and truth are. I am asking you what someone like me is to do against the drift of a liberal press in Boston, a higher educational establishment that's known to be extremely liberal. You can't say "no" to anything once the magic words "homeless" or "AIDS" or "women's issues" have been spoken. It's absolutely overwhelming to try to bring reason to bear on anything; as I see often in classes, people screen everything through narrow self-interest. We can bring up a subject in a particular course that's totally removed, for example, from native Americans, and someone will take my time and my tuition dollars to distort it and shape it through the point of view of native Americans. That's grossly unfair to me. There are many ideological agendas that I have to face all the time. Could someone comment?

William Phillips: Thank you. Would anybody in the audience like to comment?

Victoria Longino: I think the idea that seeing issues (literature, whatever subject matter you happen to be talking about) through native

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American vision or women's vision or African-American vision is a "distortion," is a major problem. To see that vision as a distortion is a distortion itself.

Karen Marco: I'm from the State University of New York. My field is history, and I was pleased, Professor Kurzweil, that you challenged the Sobol Commission, for one, that proposed essentially a "feel-good" kind of history. I understand the commission included no historians and, I think, no teachers as well. But I'd like to see some kind of differentiation between something like the Sobol Commission report and revisionist history (or literature) which is the history or literature of inclusion, that, in fact, makes room for women, African-Americans, Latino-Americans, and workers and the underclass. That's not the same, and occasionally we've been talking as if all change is more or less the same.

William Phillips: May I suggest that there seems to be some blurring of distinctions? There's a distinction between the rights of minorities, of all kinds, or the rights of different groups in society - legal rights, economic rights and other rights - and the theoretical reassessment of past history, of the history of civilization in terms of these rights. May I suggest that we keep that distinction? Otherwise we blur too many things together.

James Atlas: I'd also like to respond briefly. There are several things at issue here, not all of which have been made clear. Someone said this morning that the canon is not a fixed thing, that change always occurs. Obviously, there are different kinds of inclusion and different pressures to change the curriculum – which have manifested themselves throughout the century in the history of literary studies. You have seen the Henry James revival, and you have seen T. S. Eliot's bringing in of Donne, and minority points of view certainly do find more adequate representation now. The book by Jane Tompkins I mentioned before in passing, whose theory I resisted, turned out to be persuasive. It mentioned a number of books for which she could make a strong case – by women who had been neglected. So I think that the debate about the curriculum is a very valid one and not simply a political agenda.

William Phillips: May I suggest that we address ourselves to the fact that the so-called canon, or tradition, does change, but that we are discussing how these changes are produced, what their meanings are?

Kevin Mulcahy: I wanted to ask Edith Kurzweil a couple of questions. When I listened to your paper, it reminded me of other memoirs from

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that period - Alfred Kazin's and Lionel Trilling's - particularly about the educational confrontation of immigrants or native-born Jewish Americans with American high culture. And I remembered how (at least in Diana Trilling's recollection of it) Lionel Trilling was not going to be offered a job at Columbia because the fact that he was Jewish meant that he could not interpret English literature. And yet this did not deter a whole generation of immigrants or children of immigrants from tackling this canon, even if it was alien Protestant. In Catholic grammar schools and high schools, there was the perception that the secular culture was, if not hostile, then indifferent to Catholic values. These schools have gotten good and bad recommendations. I guess I'm asking you whether one takes on the culture on its highest terms and transforms it or takes another point of view on it. Those are two necessarily contradictory paths that might face all of us who are concerned with our country and our culture.

Edith Kurzweil: Well, these are two rather basic questions about the intellectual content and the personal one. As a number of people have indicated, this is all very personal and has to do with your own ideas and so on. But first of all, I must say Lionel Trilling's experience was different; he was of a different generation, a different group of immigrants from mine. My group came here during World War Two. We were being saved from the Nazis. So obviously there was what you might now call a kind of overglorification of America. We were those few lucky ones who had gotten away. So everything was great; Roosevelt was our savior. That is how we kids saw him, even though we now know things weren't that way. We were in the midst of World War Two. So you can't really just transfer my experience. I was talking only about what I found here, and I'm saying sincerely, in a very positive way, that I wish my students could have the kind of learning experience, the opportunity to learn, that I had; that they're being shortchanged. This does not mean that the content ought not to be updated. On the contrary, the so-called canon, the content of courses, must change. We must update history, but I'm also arguing for teaching some history. Students need to understand where it is they're coming from, what they're learning, by giving them more of it, offering it (as Roger Shattuck says) before they take other courses.

Kevin Mulcahy: How does one tackle culture? Does one attack it from a particular ethnocentric viewpoint, a class viewpoint, or does one approach the canon on other grounds?

Edith Kurzweil: Look, as someone said this morning, or before, when

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I came here we all wanted to assimilate; we wanted to forget what we escaped. We didn't want to know our German language, for example. But this has changed. It's an individual thing but depends also on the specific cultural feedback. I don't think I can answer this in any kind of theoretical way.

James Atlas: Well, I think what's at issue here is whether we can agree that there is an American culture before we decide how to approach it and how to teach it. And I think one thing that has happened, and the reason why this debate is so urgent now, is that there has been a concerted effort to undermine that rather basic premise. This is what really has led to such a crisis in our culture, it seems to me, this effort to challenge the very idea that we as a nation share certain beliefs, and that these should be taught. That is the ideological minefield which has come to dominate universities in the last decade.

Roger Shattuck: I have two comments. One is an objection to the term "canon." On our program, I'm happy to say, appears the word "curriculum." "Curriculum" suggests that, as teachers, we choose the works to put into our courses. "Canon" suggests that some higher theological authority has dropped a written list on us, that no one can make a choice. There is no "canon," there never has been. Back in Puritan times, there was more of one: it consisted of the Bible and Milton. We have come a long, long way from that, and I feel that to use the word "canon" produces a red herring. "Curriculum" means debate, argument just like this.

My second remark relates to an unspoken premise underlying our discussion, which is that these problems are going to be solved at the level of higher education; that the university, whose changing culture we are considering, is the only culture worth considering. I don't think that the proposition comes out of *Partisan Review*. Certainly, when I was reading *Partisan Review* in the forties, it took as much distance as possible from the universities and the colleges, as Bob Brustein pointed out. There is an irony, a kind of paradox, sitting here under the auspices of a little magazine (no longer little) talking about these big institutions. I believe very strongly that this monopolistic, dreadnought institution called higher learning is desperately top-heavy and overloaded and is devouring more and more aspects of our culture. What we should be looking for is an alternate institution, something to replace college for those badly served by grade school and high school. Essentially remedial work compromises the standards of too many colleges. Until we establish genuine standards for our high school degrees based on examinations, all levels of education will become increasingly wasteful.

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Edith Kurzweil: I just want to add two points in answer to Kevin Mulcahy. One, we want to remember that in fact the university is a means of upward mobility in our society, and that therefore we all agree that minorities must be admitted and must be given the best chance to get in. For this very reason I made the point that we also must make sure that what we teach is what will help students after they graduate, so that they can become as confident as possible. The other point is an aside: I was one of the first women admitted to City College in 1944.

William Phillips: I think Roger Shattuck is correct: there has been a shift, but perhaps I could point out that that's because another shift has taken place. That is, thirty, forty years ago this type of discussion mostly did not take place within the university. It took place among writers and literary critics, most of whom were not affiliated with any university. The shift has taken place for a number of reasons, it seems to me. Perhaps one of the basic reasons is economic – writers and critics in the past didn't teach in the universities, now they mostly do. So there has been a shift of concern and a shift in personnel.

Daphne Merkin: I'm on the editorial board of *Partisan Review*, and I'm a writer. While listening to the debates this morning, I've been thinking about the shift William touched on, of interest in issues of the so-called outside world (whatever that may be) by writers, people involved in ideas, in the university. Along with that, I was struck by Hilton Kramer's sort of imperious denunciation of the media, all in the form of television – the media goes well beyond television. It strikes me as a strange discrepancy that we haven't been talking about other settings in which the culture of the university is disseminated, such as book publishing. For almost four years I was the Associate Publisher of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, where I published some books having to do with the academic setting. One thing that has become very clear in the so-called media world of book publishing – even though the debate on adjusting the canon rages interuniversity, on the level of Marxist versus feminist versus Afro-American versus Latino-American – is the interaction with university culture. I'll give one small example: this year, Elaine Pfefferblit,my own editor at Poseidon Press, which is part of the very media-blooded Simon & Schuster, has published a book called *Beyond the Boom* – essays by young neoconservative writers. She was very excited about it. And when it had been suggested to her that Simon & Schuster try to publish a book of essays by young, so-called leftists, liberals, whatever you decide is the right term, the answer was: "There aren't any, and it isn't sexy" – "sexy" being a term of the media world, as Hilton knows. Somehow,

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what I think is getting lost in our discussion is that there has been a shift outside of the university to a more neoconservative (or whatever term you want to use) position.

James Atlas: That's a very interesting point, since Hilton stated in a tone of grievance this morning that liberals dominated the media. Isn't it interesting that *Beyond the Boom* is largely composed of writings by people who have jobs on editorial boards of various newspapers, who are journalists, and who have not gone into the academic world? I think Daphne is saying that if the university appears to be dominated by leftist ideologues, the world of intellectual culture beyond the university is quite substantially represented by an opposite position. Don't you think that's true?

Roger Kimball: Among the publications you have in mind here, I suppose you would have to exclude *The New York Times*: it's not exactly a bastion of neoconservative opinion.

James Atlas: No, but what's that got to do with it? Why does *The New York Times* have to be the only example represented here? I mean, isn't it true, Roger, that you and Hilton and Terry Teachout and Donna Rifkind and a lot of other people in that volume have acquired a reputation and visibility in the world and occupy a neoconservative position?

Roger Kimball: Well, first of all, Hilton is not in that volume. And the term "neoconservative" may in some senses be a red herring, like "postmodern." I'm not sure. But I can't think of another volume of essays even vaguely approaching a neoconservative identity besides that.

Daphne Merkin: What about your book?

Roger Kimball: Well, you were talking about a collection of essays, right?

Daphne Merkin: No, I'm talking about a flood of books. . . .

Roger Kimball: Well, what about Page Smith, if we're talking about education. Or Henry Rosovsky?

Daphne Merkin: Roger, these are exceptions. . . .

Roger Kimball: Henry Rosovsky is hardly an exception.

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James Atlas: Well, both sides get their point of view put across.

Roger Kimball: No. Daphne Merkin was saying that there is a kind of neoconservative orthodoxy that is overwhelmingly represented.

Daphne Merkin: All I'm saying is that there has been a seismic shift.

Roger Kimball: I think what *Beyond the Boom* represents perhaps more than anything else - in the context of this conference - is that the neoconservative (to use that term) point of view is not represented in the academy. There's not a single contributor to that collection of essays who has an appointment in the academy or could have one.

James Atlas: They're lucky. I should think that's a sign of vigor.

Roger Kimball: Maybe, for the culture as a whole. It's not a sign of vigor for the university, I would suggest.

James Atlas: I agree with that.

Lloyd Eby: I'm from *The World and I* magazine. I also teach at the University of the District of Columbia. It seems to me that the underlying problem here is that we no longer agree what human beings are or what they ought to be. The notion of human nature has been attacked. I agree with James Atlas who said that previous immigrants attempted to become Americans; nowadays the notion of what it is to be an American is under attack. Previously we tended to see people as people, as persons, whereas increasingly they're being seen as members of groups - racial groups, sexual groups, ethnic groups, or whatever. And that strikes me as the underlying problem.

William Phillips: Thank you. We have just a few minutes more.

Jerry Spriggs: I'm a student in Boston, a native New Yorker and a native American. This debate obviously has been going on for an awful long time. I'm fifty years old, and I remember debates at Cornell University about blacks going to an Ivy League university. I totally disagree with most of what's being said today, as if you have a lock on intellectualism. You dismiss the Indian American, the African American, the Asian American, and you speak of "American" as if it's something new. What makes this country great or bad is the fact that we are different - with a heritage from whichever country you came from. I happen to be

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an American Afro-American Indian. And we do and did have a history, and you I'm sure have a history, be it Jewish, Greek, Irish, Italian, or whatever. You immigrated to this country and were able to assimilate because you changed your names; you changed your positions, classes. But I'll always be a black in America, an Indian black American. And there are cultures and diversities in this country. But you're very pompous. I don't see a black or an Italian, maybe, or someone from a minority sitting up there. And I'm sure there are learned writers in America who could have given a diverse opinion. It's very pompous of you to assume that we don't have a history and that you have a lock on the intelligentsia. You do not.

William Phillips: We had an Afro-American on the panel this morning.

Edith Kurzweil: And we sent out ten thousand announcements everywhere. But we can't force people to come.

William Phillips: We asked Henry Louis Gates, by the way, to appear on a panel and he refused. You can't have it both ways, you know.

Victoria Longino: It's a point of view, not just who's on your panel. I mean, you can't always get someone to fill a quota. . . .

William Phillips: What's wrong with that? Aren't we allowed a point of view?

Victoria Longino: Absolutely.

Edith Kurzweil: I think we are accused of not having invited some of the people whom we did invite but who, in fact, didn't come because they're very much in demand, who had other engagements.

William Phillips: I think there's something to be said for a point of view. And it's interesting that many of you have been expressing a point of view, and no one has objected to the expression of a point of view. I find myself baffled by this impatience.

Jerry Spriggs: The First Amendement.

William Phillips: The First Amendment? Don't we have that? Has anybody been denied freedom of speech here? Incidentally, in the interests of civility and of civil discourse, I want to reiterate that if I or anybody

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else here has been making demeaning remarks about people whom we disagree with, we regret that and retract it. All we had in mind was to express differences of opinion, different points of view. I want to make that clear.

Joe Flynn: I'm from the State University of New York. I would like to go back to the topic of this panel, to one of the main speaker's remarks. I'm wondering whether or not one of the differences between your experience and mine those many years ago was not that there was, at least on the part of the student, a perceived coherence, or at least an admiration for the professoriate. Whether or not there was a coherence, there certainly was a great deal of public discourse and dispute within the university, among the faculty. Quite frankly, I find this debate about the nature of the curriculum refreshing, and particularly that it takes place in front of students and even includes students. But I don't perceive now the kind of coherent agreement among faculty that there seemed to be thirty or forty years ago.

Edith Kurzweil: Just very briefly: if I've given the impression that there was no disagreement, then I'm sorry. In fact, there was a great deal. Most of my professors used the Socratic method. We had very heated discussions in classrooms. And in addition to the variety of subjects we were exposed to at City College, our instructors ranged over the political spectrum. But I cannot answer for the rest of the universities throughout the country.

Williiam Phillips: Come for the sessions tomorrow, and we'll have plenty of opportunity for more disagreements and discussions. In the meantime, thank you for your contributions.

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The Revolt Against Tradition: Readers, Writers, and Critics

William Phillips: I'm looking forward to a scintillating session. The subject of this morning's panel is "The Revolt Against Tradition: Readers, Writers and Critics." The main paper will be delivered by Robert Alter, Professor of Comparative Literature and Hebrew Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. His last book, which was a study of deconstruction and related trends, was called *The Pleasures of Reading*. The commentators are, first, Denis Donoghue, one of our leading literary critics. He divides his time between his native Ireland and New York University, where he occupies the Henry James Chair of Literature. His last book is his autobiography, *Warrenpoint*. Immediately at my left is Steven Marcus, who is a member of the Editorial Board of *Partisan Review* and Professor of English at Columbia University. He is the author of many books and essays, among them *The Other Victorians*.

Robert Alter: I have to say that when I entered the academic profession I made two negative vows: that I would never have to lecture before nine o'clock in the morning and that I would never teach a class on Saturday. So here I am in violation of both. The first fifteen minutes or so of my talk will involve a number of sweeping generalizations, but I promise to get down to specific cases.

One of the most disquieting features of contemporary American academic culture is the growing chasm between the study of literature in the university and the reading practices of educated people outside the academy. Proponents of the sundry varieties of new academic criticism will of course argue that those very reading practices are naive, intellectually otiose, unwittingly complicit with the manipulative pressures of regnant ideologies. I would counter that claims of this sort are more institutionally self-serving than, as those who make them contend, culturally soul-searching, and that the peculiar treatment literature is now widely accorded in the academy is dictated far more by an inner momentum of academic life than by a serious critical engagement with the larger culture.

It becomes increasingly clear that the 1960s were the great watershed in the evolution of the university in this country. This is most obvious in the continuing legacy of what some French circles now dismissively call "the thought of '68," which is manifested in American critical trends like deconstruction, radical feminism, neo-Marxism, and the critique of colonial discourse. Before 1968, however, and ultimately under-

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lying all these trends, is the sheer fact of the immense expansion of the university – new campuses mushrooming, old ones multiplied in size – that took place in the early sixties. That expansion triggered a crisis of professional identity both for those already in the academy and for those preparing to enter it, especially in the humanities, and a criticism that insists on the ultimately ideological character of both literature and criticism is at least in part an uneasy solution to this crisis of identity. This new criticism is of course actuated by political concerns as well, but certain of its underlying motives are strongly linked to internal developments of the university as an institution.

Let me offer a rough sketch of three successive waves of American literary scholarship. The first, going back to the early decades of the century, was positivist and historical in its assumptions and philological in its methodology (at this point, philology, long unjustly maligned, may begin to seem not such a bad idea). Here you would encounter the kind of scholar who could spend hours prowling through the antique weapons sections of museums in an effort to discover an original model for Milton's "two-handed engine of destruction." This group of Germanic-style researchers was leavened by a healthy admixture of quite a different group, especially in departments of English – gentlemen-scholars, men (of course, there were scarcely any women) who were cultivated readers, Anglophiles, "appreciators" of literary values, and on the whole nonpublishing teachers. A striking change occurred in the 1940s and 50s, at least at many elite institutions, with the entrance into the academy of people who were more critics than scholars in the old sense. These new teachers of literature were more likely to publish in the *Partisan Review* or *The Kenyon Review* than in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Many of them came to their academic jobs from work as literary journalists, editors, freelance writers, in some notable instances without the benefit of graduate-school training and a Ph.D. As evaluative critics, some of whom were also practicing poets and novelists, they were keenly concerned with contemporary literature and its urgent antecedents in High Modernism and the nineteenth century, and often raised questions in their essayistic manner about the moral, political, and cognitive uses of literature. This wave of literary scholars might on occasion be faulted for self-conscious phrase-making, pontification, facile generalization, but it represents a moment of optimal closeness between the academic scrutiny of literature and the kind of attention devoted to serious literature by an educated public outside the academy. Whatever their errors and limitations, the makers of the so-called Age of Criticism in the middle decades of the century brought to the academic study of literature a liveliness, a sense of vital engagement in the experiential dynamics of reading, that it did not have before and has not had since.

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Now, it is common to designate the third wave of literary studies, the one that engulfs us at this moment, as the wave of theory, but that is in part a misnomer. It should be noted that the very term "theory" has been turned into a club with which to beat down the opposition, as one can see, for example, in the recent fulminations of Gerald Graff. "Theory," in this acceptation, is assumed to be intellectually serious, conceptually daring, boldly adversary to established opinion, while everything else is mere time-serving. Every other person in a department of literature these days claims to be a theorist. The problem, as Louis Menand has shrewdly observed in a recent article in *The New Republic*, is not that they are theorists but that they are conformists, repeating certain fashionable formulas and strategies of argumentation.

A literary theorist is someone with a certain capacity for original abstract thinking who proposes categories to define the nature of literature, its connections with and differences from other modes of expression, its organizing dynamics, its possible links with extraliterary reality. In making these propositions, the theorist performs a valuable service by obliging us to rethink our unexamined assumptions about the body of texts we study. Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Kenneth Burke, Northrop Frye, Roman Jakobson are all strong and salutary instances of literary theorists, however much one might want to debate any of their views. There is only intermittent evidence, however, among the scholars waving the banner of theory today, of people capable, like the writers in my brief list, of thinking through basic assumptions about literature and of articulating new conceptual frameworks. What qualifies them as "theorists" is a high dosage of abstraction in their prose, an avoidance of sustained readings of specific literary texts, and, above all, a constant ritual invocation of theoretical phrases and formulas struck by others – usually by figures more removed from the actual study of literature than those on my list, like Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, or Edward Said.

The defining feature of the third wave of literary scholarship is not theory but professional consolidation as a guild – or rather a series of sometimes competing sub-guilds – of intellectual technocrats. In the vastness of the new university world first shaped in the early 60s, with no possibility of sustaining the illusion that this was an elite profession of cultivated amateurs or secluded researchers, academicians sought to differentiate themselves as much as possible from other readers and to give themselves a sense of distinctive vocational solidarity. The easiest way to effect this end was on the level of terminology, though the need for differentiation goes much deeper than terminology. If instead of talking about the novel in the old homespun terms of plot and character and point of view, one insisted on diagesis and analepsis, subject position and discursive strategy, one could savor the superiority of belonging to a

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privileged class of specialists who grasped things more profoundly than the common reader. Indeed, as with any kind of dialect – ethnic, regional, generational, class – the special language served to confirm membership in the group and to exclude the uninitiated.

This general movement of aggressive esotericism is intimately allied with an unprecedented preoccupation with power on several levels. It has proved, first of all, to be a highly effective means for consolidating power within the academy. If you are, say, a Marxisant critic or a deconstructionist, you belong to a highly defined prestige network of likeminded critics in which status is established by the persuasive emulation in phrase and intellectual gesture of one or two or three models. With a little luck, you may be able to stack a department with adherents of the same sectarian trend, enabling you to dominate the curriculum, influence students, isolate or marginalize colleagues who do not follow the party line. And since the academic market responds rapidly and sensitively to what is fashionable in the eyes of its faculty constituency, the material rewards of dedicated trendiness can be substantial. It is perhaps not even ironic that literary Marxists have become some of the great entrepreneurs of the American academy, commanding three or four times the salary of the academic proletariat (the assistant professors, the "conventional" scholars at less prestigious institutions), enjoying endowed chairs with generous perks and in some instances their own journals or research institutes.

From the standpoint of the larger society – say, a Wall Street law firm or a large corporation – power of this sort is very small potatoes. Proponents of the new wave of literary scholarship are themselves keenly aware of the disparity, and in a variety of ways what they have to say about literature is obsessed with the idea of power, even to the point of totally submerging literature in power. Whether the angle is feminist or Foucauldian or anticolonial or deconstructionist, literature is construed again and again as an instrument for the exercise of power, with the much-reviled canon as the supreme expression of ugly or sinister "hegemonic" forces. Shakespeare is no longer a revealer of dizzying breadths and awesome depths of character and psychology or a shaper of some of the most beautiful verbal artifacts our culture has known but is rather a manifestation of British imperialism, patriarchy, European racism, logocentrism, or what you will. And there is no intrinsic value to literary works; value is rather fixed by the subtly coercive power of "communities of interpretation," which change in the course of time.

What goes hand-in-glove with the conception of literature as an epiphenomenon of political power is an assumption – really, an illusion – that criticism or "theory" provides a tremendous lever of power against the oppressive structures of the surrounding society. The various academic

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sectarians, by their very use of a specialized dialect and a closed set of orthodox principles of political faith, can actually address only members of their own ideological sub-group, but they cherish the notion that through their writing they will "deconstruct" the language of society at large, expose its oppressive aims, effect a radical transformation in general consciousness, and bring about a new age of liberation. The revolution will come not from the barrel of a gun but from a reversal of hermeneutic practice, a fusillade of labored puns, the subversive introduction of parentheses in the middle of ordinary English words. The addiction to this odd but seductive illusion may explain in part why Marxism continues to flourish luxuriantly on our campuses a year after the wholesale collapse of communism in Europe. The academic Marxists, after all, continue, as they have always done, to speak to each other and to pretend they are addressing the concerns of the general culture. What happens in the realm of history, of real political events, hardly matters because the internal academic discussion from the start had only a suppositious relation to political realities.

The current academic preoccupation with power manifests itself on one other level, which is the critic's assertion of power over the work of literature under consideration. Behind this assertion lies a fear or at least a certain leeriness, of what Walter Benjamin once quite reverently called "the power of the text." An element of generational rebellion may also be involved in this feeling, a reaction against the perceived excesses of the New Critics (decades after the fact, still the most popular whipping-boys) or the mid-century New York Critics, who variously saw the literary text as a crystallization of immense imaginative insight and uncanny complexity. The reign of the idolatry of the text has been followed by the era of the hermeneutics of suspicion. A degree of suspicion is no doubt a healthy component of intellectual life, but suspicion, too, has its excesses, and in the current climate every critic with the vehement will to brandish terms like "reification," "phallogocentric," and "oppressive discourse" can place himself or herself in a position of powerful superiority to Shakespeare and Tolstoy.

This last point touches on an essential aspect of difference between literature as it is now often expounded in the university and the expectations of literature among educated readers outside the academy. Reading itself, as has often been proposed, may be an endangered activity in our society, and perhaps the actual distaste for literature that begins to find expression in some academic circles could itself be a reflection of this cultural pathology. But for the many thousands of Americans who still read works of literature more challenging than formula-fiction and the daily newspaper, there are good indications that they seek in literature not only entertainment but something like a better understanding of

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things, an order of insight not available to them through the popular media or even through other intellectual disciplines.

A couple of years ago, I was invited to give a talk to a local association of psychiatrists on any literary topic of my choice. I decided to speak on the mimetic persuasiveness of fictional character. Especially because my framework was not in the least psychoanalytic, I was apprehensive, with my profession-bound academic assumptions, that I would be challenged in the question-period for the naivete of my approach, my failure to consider primary-process thinking, sublimation, and so forth. Most of the responses proved instead to be not challenges but testimonials to the illuminating power of fiction. Some of my principal examples had been drawn from Stendhal, and one woman analyst announced that since her first reading of Stendhal when she was twenty her understanding of human nature had been permanently changed and deepened. Needless to say, a professor of literature making such a declaration would be exposed to ridicule – an ironic disparity that suggests how much the teaching of literature has come to serve the internal vocational needs of an academic technocracy, how little it is in touch with the serious cultural needs of the larger society.

It would be easy to cite rather silly examples from current academic criticism in which the critic breezily condescends to the text or quickly leaves it behind in pursuit of bigger game like late capitalism, the early formation of the ego, the phallus as ultimate signifier, or the "discursive strategies" of a whole cultural era. I think it will be more instructive, however, to look at specimens of fashionable criticism at its assumed best. Let me propose for consideration two recent devaluations of Joyce's *Ulysses*, one by Fredric Jameson, who is I suppose the leading American Marxist critic, and the other by Leo Bersani, one of the most independent-minded of the poststructuralist critics, whose general orientation is psychoanalytic and metapsychological.

Joyce's novel, of course, is a central canonical text of High Modernism (a fact that in itself is likely to raise suspicion in the minds of third-wave critics), and was regularly celebrated as such by the nonacademic and essayistic critics who wrote for literary journals in this country during the first three or four decades after the publication of *Ulysses*. Since, it has also notoriously become the subject of a formidable academic industry, as was entirely predictable. Joyce, one of the most pedantic as well as one of the most inventive of great novelists, knew perfectly well that he was providing an endless vista of work for the professors in his elaborate edifice of allusion and cross-references and recondite lore. One should not condescend to all this scholarly activity. It has produced some illuminating commentary on Joyce. (As Frederick Crews recently observed, there is a good deal of fine scholarship done by

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single-author specialists, including young ones, that tends to be overlooked by nonspecialists, who have their eyes on the prestige network, which is decidedly elsewhere.) Bersani imagines the captains of the Joyce industry as participants in a modern "culture of redemption," conceiving literature as the vehicle of redemption, though I should think most of them were rather library-bound addicts of erudition, responding to the arcane learning of the master, and thereby making a modest academic career for themselves. In any case, both Bersani and Jameson look askance at all the Joyceans and raise questions about whether *Ulysses* is really the sort of masterwork our culture needs.

Jameson illustrates with particular vividness how the adversaries of the traditional canon are themselves actuated by a zeal for canon-formation on unbending principles that would make the arbiters of taste of all previous eras look like models of flexibility. *Ulysses* is an extravagantly symbolic novel, and Jameson announces early in his essay that "we have learned this particular lesson fairly well: . . . that for us, any art which practices symbolism is already discredited before the fact." The identity of the "we" who have learned this lesson is unspecified, an ambiguity that reflects the problem of audience to which I have already referred. Presumably, the "we" embraces all sophisticated students of literature after Derrida. However, the tenor of the essay as a whole would in fact restrict the first-person plural to American academic Marxists who are followers or associates of Jameson. Having condemned Joyce for the cardinal sin of "facile affirmation that the existent also means that things are symbols," Jameson attempts to rescue something for readerly attention by construing *Ulysses* as an authentic reflection of alienation under capitalism – a strategy that does not distinguish the novel very clearly from, say, newspaper and magazine advertisements.

Jameson's initial interpretive maneuver is to insist on both an isomorphism and a causal connection between formal features of the novel and industrial processes, social patterns, economic constellations, and so forth. Fragmentation, manifested in "the meaningless yet efficient segments of mass industrial production," is also a key to Joyce's novel, in which "time, experience, and storytelling . . . are inexorably atomised and broken down into their most minimal unities." This reductive analogy confuses fragmentation and microscopic detail, atomization and elliptic free association. The great interior monologues of *Ulysses* weave memories and perceived images and recurring phrases into ever-thickening webs of extraordinary tensile strength; this powerfully integrative process of mimetic art is virtually the opposite of the assembly-line alienation of labor ritually invoked, as by Jameson, in Marxist analysis. In a related move, Jameson contends that "point of view" narration – roughly, *style indirect libre* – which predominates in Part One of the novel, is, in his-

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torical terms, "the quasi-material expression of a fundamental social development itself, namely the increasing social fragmentation and monadisation of late capitalist society, the intensifying privatisation and isolation of its subjects." This bold and agile leap from social history to novelistic form leaves beneath it a vast field strewn with unanswered questions. Is interest in subjective experience necessarily dictated by social fragmentation? Why are there anticipations of point-of-view narration in the Hebrew Bible, composed in the early Iron Age? Why do the first subtle articulations of the technique in the European novel occur in the *Princesse de Clèves*, a book written in the court of Louis XIV? Does the fact that this method of narration was brought to a mature perfection in the novels of Stendhal have even a remote connection with the monadization of the subject under late capitalism? Why is it that in the age of still later capitalism, in fiction written since World War II, point-of-view narration has so often been displaced by first-person narration or flamboyantly omniscient narration?

But sensing that to reduce Joyce to an unwitting reflection of social forces is scarcely a rehabilitation. Jameson, a poststructuralist as well as a Marxist, tries to find some redeeming value in this gross purveyor of symbols by arguing that *Ulysses* reacts against the capitalist wasteland by carrying out a conscious "dereification." In his reading, the two concluding chapters before Molly's soliloquy enact a salutary "radical depersonalisation" that "also removes the reader, and finally that unifying and organising mirage or afterimage of both author and reader which is the 'character,' or better still, 'point of view.'" With the withdrawal of these organizing categories of the reading experience, all that is left is "a form of material unity . . . , the printed book itself," the letters on the bound pages and their self-reflexive interlinks. Jameson's language sounds sophisticated but the idea behind it is entirely untenable. Any appreciable distinction between the late chapters of *Ulysses* and the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet dissolves. In order to make his point, Jameson characterizes the "Ithaca" chapter, which is done with catechistic query and response in scientifically factual language, as one of the two most boring sections of the novel. (For whatever reason, he doesn't even mention the "Oxen of the Sun" as a source of tedium.) I don't want to dispute Jameson's right to be bored by what he chooses, but in my own reading experience, Ithaca is one of the most haunting pieces of writing in modern fiction. This is so for me because I find nothing in the chapter that tempts me to imagine Bloom's – or Stephen's – disappearance as a character or my own as a reader. On the contrary, the scientific catechism is a means of beautifully defusing pathos while inviting the reader to contemplate Bloom's pathetic circumstances, the sorry but ever hopeful tangle of his existence, under the aspect of eternity. "Alone," the catechistic

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asks, "what did Bloom feel?" The response is not a dissolution of the subject but the poignant representation of a human being under the immense vault of the stars, those scary distances of which Pascal wrote: "The cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing point or the absolute zero of Fahrenheit, Centigrade, or Réaumur: the incipient intimations of proximate dawn."

At the beginning of his essay, Jameson observes dismissively that the Joycean parallel to Odysseus's absence from Penelope is a "ten-year period" during which Bloom practices "coitus interruptus or anal intercourse" with Molly. This is perhaps a small error but one that is strikingly symptomatic of the predisposition to impose a pattern on the work of literature rather than attend to its minute and instructive details. The sexual practices Jameson refers to are familiar ones in life and literature but do not occur in the Bloom household. Molly in her soliloquy is quite explicit about the substitute for vaginal intercourse adopted by her husband during the ten and a half years since the death of their infant son. Bloom ejaculates by pressing himself against her buttocks ("the last time he came on my bottom"), probably in the odd bedtime position he favors of head to Molly's feet. Neither the anus nor the vagina is involved. To imagine Bloom penetrating Molly, as Jameson does, is to misconceive something important about Bloom's character as Joyce represents it. His response to the traumatic loss of his son is not merely a fear of further paternity but a sad surrender of any full claim to conjugal possession. He may in fact be impotent ever since the death of Rudi, at least in regard to actual penetration (the novel is ambiguous about this because the explicit references to impotence occur in the fantasy of Nighttown). In any case, Molly is the promised land that he, Bloom-Moses, now cannot enter. He nevertheless continues to long for this unattainable bourne. He has sexual fantasies aplenty that wander elsewhere, but he still loves Molly in his complicated way and, however hopelessly, still passionately desires her. The habit of consummation by pressing against her buttocks is a nice indication of this terrible, self-subverting ambiguity that he has made of his married life. It is also a small intimation that between Jameson's impossible poles of spurious symbolism and reduction to mere printed artifact lies a large middle ground – where, I think, most readers really respond to the novel – in which the full concreteness of individual lives is persuasively imagined. This mimetic enterprise is no doubt meant to be reinforced and extended in meaning by the novel's structure of symbols and archetypes, but it is not strictly dependent on the symbolic references, as one may reasonably infer from the telling image of Bloom in bed with Molly, which exerts its revelatory mimesis even if one puts entirely out of mind both Ulysses and Moses.

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Leo Bersani's devaluative essay is considerably more interesting than Jameson's because it does not attempt to force the book into prefabricated ideological formulas. He has some thought-provoking ideas to propose about the novel, like his intriguing if enigmatic notion that the Aristotelian Joyce came in *Ulysses* to imagine that "literature could quote being independently of any particular being's point of view." He also evinces a lively sense of what is going on in *Ulysses*, as when he writes that "the text . . . is transformed into a kind of electrical board with innumerable points of light connected to one another in elaborate, crisscrossing patterns." Bersani has a keen appreciation of Joyce's architectonic virtuosity – indeed, in one respect, as I shall argue momentarily, he rather overestimates its effect. The concomitant, however, of this appreciation is an odd lack of responsiveness to the novel's mimetic aims that is akin to the related failure of perception in Jameson.

As he approaches the conclusion of his essay, he announces that "*Ulysses* is a text to be deciphered but not read. . . . The exegetical work to be done is enormous, but it has already been done by the author and we simply have to catch up with him." The meaning of the novel, that is, will totally manifest itself once we are able, through the exercise of "a nearly superhuman memory," to turn on every possible light on the crisscrossing circuits of its great electric board. Escaping "the reader's dangerous freedom," the novel "asks that we be nothing but the exegetical machinery necessary to complete its sense." Bersani also suggests, in keeping with the larger argument of his book, that the surrender of one's freedom to this magisterially preemptive text is an affirmation of belonging to a community of (spurious) redemption, though I cannot see where or how the novel makes redemptive claims, or how anyone outside a tiny group of Joyce cultists actually reads *Ulysses* that way.

The point is that we do read *Ulysses*, not merely decipher it, and that the process of deciphering, however amusing as an intellectual pastime or however useful as a means of orienting oneself in the novel, is very far from determining the meanings of the book. Leopold and Molly Bloom are two of the most compelling characters in modern literature not because they are Ulysses and Penelope, or Elijah and Gea-Tellus, but because they are such splendidly individual, experientially substantial representations of an *homme moyen sensuel* and a *femme moyenne sensuelle*. Their lives, extravagantly different – one hopes – from the lives of most of us, succeed in touching something deep in our lives as we read. I will resist quoting a passage without allusions and cross-references, of which there are, after all, many in the novel, and instead cite a paragraph in which both occur, in order to test whether the effect is the displacement of reading by deciphering. Here is Bloom coming out of the cemetery after attending Paddy Digman's funeral at the end of the Hades episode:

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> The gates glimmered in front: still open. Back to the world again. Enough of this place. Brings you a bit nearer every time. Last time I was here was Mrs. Sinico's funeral. Poor papa too. The love that kills. And even scraping up the earth at night with a lantern like that case I read of to get at fresh buried females or even putrefied with running gravesores. Give you the creeps after a bit. I will appear to you after death. You will see my ghost after death. My ghost will haunt you after death. There is another world after death named hell. I do not like that other world she wrote. No more do I. Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life.

The glimmering gates at the beginning of course are an allusion to the gates of Hades in Book X of the *Odyssey*. The reverberation of the moment is amplified by the mythic allusion, a procedure that has been employed by writers of all sorts again and again through the ages. It is hard to see, though, how the here-and-now specificity of Bloom's experience at the Prospect Cemetery is in any way engulfed, subverted, or even defined in meaning by the invocation of Homeric Hades. The warm beds at the end probably refer both to the bed of Calypso that Bloom has left at the beginning of his morning and the bed of Penelope it will become at the end of the novel. In any event, the obvious force of the image is concrete rather than mythic, and it takes no feat of memory to recall the marriage bed in which somnolent Molly sprawls that dominates Bloom's first chapter. At a couple of other points in the passage, memory is more severely taxed. Mrs. Sinico's funeral alludes to "A Painful Case," a story in *Dubliners*. Such coy self-reference goes back in fiction at least to Balzac, and I hardly think it matters for our sense of the meaning of the passage whether we can identify Mrs. Sinico. The "she" who wrote, "I do not like that other world" is Martha, Bloom's romantic correspondent, and the sentence occurs in the letter from her he read in the previous chapter. Perhaps we may recall the letter, but does it make a great deal of difference if we fail this small memory-quiz, if, say, we imagine the sentence cited was written by a younger Molly? Poor papa hardly needs elucidation. The fact that he was a suicide, as we have recently learned , makes the fragmentary reference all the more poignant. I am not sure whether the appearance of the father's ghost – which actually will occur in Nighttown – is also a garbled reference by Bloom to Hamlet, or a citation of some piece of popular Gothic literature.

The imaginative effectiveness, in any case, of the passage, transcends all such citational and cross-referencing activity that may reinforce its meanings. What stands at the center is the vivid representation of a man on the border between.the realm of the living and the dead, himself full

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of stubborn life, his quirky, irrepressibly prurient imagination constantly working away at the stuff of experience – as when in these grave circumstances he recalls reading an article about necrophilia. Bloom is preeminently a Sancho to Stephen's Quixote in his adherence to Sancho's motto, *hasta la muerta todo es vida*, until death everything is life. "They are not going to get me this innings," he says, thinking of the warm refuge of Molly's bed as his intimately personal – not just archetypal – image of life. "Plenty to see and hear and feel yet." All that kaleidoscopic plenty of the senses is the substance of Joyce's novel, the driving-force and justification for its interior monologues and its other narrative techniques. It is the narrative realization of life's plenty to see and hear and feel that makes this book a great novel for readers, not only for exegetes, despite all its extravagant show of learning and the convolute loops of its formal design.

Leo Bersani is one of the best of the third-wave academic critics because he has the intellectual élan to work out his own challenging categories of analysis. He shares, however, with the many lesser figures a predisposition to submit literature to a new canonical inquisition, banning or blessing on the basis of criteria that belong to an extraliterary agenda. Though it is of course true that no reading is entirely innocent, that everyone brings to the text a range of concerns and predispositions fostered by the world outside the text, there is a crucial difference between possessing an agenda and a value. My own reading of *Ulysses* no doubt presupposes the essential value of the self and its experience – as, I would argue, Joyce himself did. Adherence to this particular value may dispose me to particularly sympathetic response to certain kinds of literature but it does not prevent me from enjoying other kinds as well and it does not compel me to make categorical decisions about what is authentic and inauthentic in literary expression. To have an agenda, on the other hand, which is to say, a sweeping program for evaluating and transforming human existence, leads to a canon-making mindset that judges each work of art quite inexorably in regard to whether it contributes to or deflects from the urgent program.

Jameson's agenda, at least on the level of rhetorical gesture, is the destruction of the bourgeois world. Bersani's more complicated agenda is the pulverization of the unitary self, to which, in much of his recent writing, he attributes our sundry political, moral, and social ills. For him, as for many postmodern critics, the individual subject itself (himself? herself?) has become ideologically suspect, somehow implicated in those sinister concentrations of political power that oppress anarchic spirits and prepare the instruments for nuclear apocalypse. Only a literature that breaks down what Bersani calls the "myth of personality" can innoculate consciousness against the killing illusions of our culture. I am not sure if I

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understand what Bersani actually means by his repeated celebrations of the dissolution of the self, but it is worth noting that his argument to that effect in his essay on Pynchon, which he is careful to place in immediate sequence with his devaluation of Joyce, just as the two appeared when they were published periodically, points to the conclusion that Pynchon is a better writer, or at any rate a more authentic writer, than Joyce. Even before the publication of the unfortunate *Vineland*, that is hardly a judgment that a critic of Bersani's intelligence should want even to imply.

I do not mean to sound unduly bleak. If there have been three waves of literary scholarship in recent memory, we may yet live to see a fourth, and better, wave. And there are certainly still many people of all ages teaching at our universities who are passionately devoted to literature and capable of conveying something of their passion and their informed understanding to the young. For the moment, however, such people are likely to feel embattled, perhaps isolated. In far too many instances, political concerns, the explicit preoccupation with power on the several levels we have seen, tend to push the reading of literature to the margins. Even some astute critics strenuously resist the idea that literature may offer a unique experiential density, perhaps even a deepened apprehension of life. Outside the academy, this is still why many readers care about books.

William Phillips: Thank you. Denis Donoghue.

Denis Donoghue: In the Spring 1938 issue of *The Yale Review*, Archibald MacLeish published an essay called "The Public Poetry of W. B. Yeats." In the course of the essay, he quoted a sentence from Thomas Mann which has often floated free of its context. The sentence reads, in English: "In our time, the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms." A few weeks after the publication of the essay, it was brought to Yeats's attention, and he wrote a little poem about it, called "Politics," using Mann's sentence as an epigraph:

> How can I, that girl standing there,
> My attention fix
> On Roman or on Russian
> Or on Spanish politics?
> Yet here's a travelled man that knows
> What he talks about,
> And there's a politician
> That has both read and thought,
> And maybe what they say is true

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Of war and wars' alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms.

My justification for alluding to that little episode is as a text for two considerations which bear on contemporary literary criticism. The first is the privileging of political definitions of reality over any other definitions, and especially over religious, esthetic, or any other terms. The second consideration is that Yeats's riposte to Mann indicates the totalizing amibition of any and every vocabulary. Every vocabulary wants to round itself out; it wants to take full possession of the space. Sex is Yeats's answer to politics: each is a totalizing force.

If we bring together these two considerations, we see the difficulties that beset us in literary criticism. Literary criticism has rarely been allowed to mind its own business. It has always been required to yield ground, often a great deal, to considerations religious, political, economic, theological, even when its inclinations have been formal, esthetic, and technical. At present, discourse is political, especially when it pretends not to be. This is one of our great difficulties: we are not allowed to mind our own business.

To give an illustration of how things have changed: T. S. Eliot asserted, in an early essay, that the purpose of literary criticism is the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. What would it mean today to quote Eliot's assertion? We might be able to say that if we elucidate works of art, we do something to correct taste. Again, it's difficult to say to our students today, as Eliot said to us many years ago, that when you read literature, it is as literature you must read it and not as another thing. What does that mean? How could we make it mean something useful?

Robert Alter refers to two essays – one by Fredric Jameson, the other by Leo Bersani. He regards these essays as marking a regettable (if not indeed sinister) development in literary criticism. But I wonder: Are they, in fact, representative? Is it not still the case that when our students are reading *Ulysses* and they need further enlightenment beyond their own reading or their teacher's suggestions, they go to a famous essay by R. P. Blackmur, or to standard works by Richard Ellmann, or to Hugh Kenner's book on *Ulysses*. If they are diligent, they go to certain essays by Fritz Senn. They may read Derek Attridge's *Peculiar Language* or many other commentaries. I'm questioning wether the general understanding of *Ulysses* is as much compromised as Alter suggests by the two essays he has in mind. Besides, while I disagree with these essays just as seriously as Alter does, I wish our profession were characterized by the intelligence and care which both Jameson and Bersani have disclosed in their en-

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gagement with literature.

Leo Bersani's essay is indeed (I think, regrettably) called, "Against Ulysses." The title is too brisk, even as an indication of his relation to that novel. His argument is that *Ulysses* is not what it claimed to be – a challenging, interrogative work of modernism. On the contrary, Bersani says, it is a nineteenth-century realistic novel of character and personality, predicated upon "a conservative ideology of the self." The implication of the book, according to Bersani, is that in Joyce's mind at last, not only has nature become culture but culture has become man. *Ulysses*, Bersani says, is faithful to our humanist tradition in its reenactment of its assumptions and promise, that the possession of culture will transcend anxiety and perhaps even redeem history. Joyce gives us back our culture as "his" culture. Finally, according to Bersani, *Ulysses* domesticates the forces with which it deals, and shows us the form a serene possession of cultural acquisitions would take. It is not an avant-garde work. The genuinely avant-garde writer is Beckett rather than Joyce.

Bersani is dismayed to find that *Ulysses* permits us to think of its characters as if they existed before the beginning of the book and might continue after the end. William Empson once speculated that the first thing Molly Bloom would do with Stephen Dedalus when she got her hands on him would be to make him take a bath. Bersani's dismay is an old story. Many years ago L. C. Knights wrote an ironic essay called "How Many Children Had Lady MacBeth?" – the title a parody of critical concerns with questions of character. In those days, F. R. Leavis, Knights, and other "Scrutiny" critics argued that Shakespeare's plays, for example, are not plays of character but dramatic poems most completely disclosed in their structures of imagery. Bersani's reference to a "conservative ideology of the self" has in view not only the fact that Joyce enables us to think that his characters exist, but that their existence is a function of the internal lives which Joyce ascribes to them. We believe in the existence of Leopold Bloom – at least notionally – because we find that he has full access to a distinctive internal life. My own sense of the matter is that our "assent" to Leopold Bloom is not a matter of belief, but of supposition: if he were to exist, he would have such thoughts, such ramblings, such desires. So that as readers, we proceed as if he existed while knowing that he doesn't.

Bersani writes as if a "conservative ideology of the self" were self-evidently and automatically wicked. He has done nothing to justify such a judgment. Indeed, if he resents the plenitude of the inner lives ascribed to Leopold Bloom, Stephen, and Molly, and so on, I can't see how he is entitled to his resentment. Surely Emmanuel Levinas is right to say, as he does in *Totality and Infinity*, that "the inner life is the unique way for the real to exist as a plurality"; and again that "interiority is the very

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possibility of a birth and a death that do not derive their meaning from history." Interiority, Levinas says, constitutes an order different from historical time in which totality is constituted, an order where everything is pending, where what is no longer possible historically remains always possible. Now it seems to me that there is a deeper and more profound justice in Levinas's attitude than in Bersani's.

A word about Fredric Jameson's essay, "*Ulysses* in History," and the first chapter of his book, *Fables of Aggression*: Jameson has long resented the particular version of modernism which he finds in the early Joyce and the early Eliot – on the grounds that in such works as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Profrock," *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, these writers make available certain devices for conveying an alienated world into personal styles, personal gestures, continuous modes of inwardness. In one respect, Jameson's attack on Eliot and Joyce is the standard Marxist attack on the subjective emphasis in modern literature. Lukács and other critics have argued that many works of modern literature present individual characters as lonely, isolated, beleaguered figures, and endow their loneliness with a metaphysical aura, the glamor of their doom. In the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, for example, as Jameson reads it, the details are unified by the stylistic tone in which all contradictions are ironically resolved, as well as by the overall unity of Leopold Bloom's personality. That is to say: Joyce keeps faith with the illusions of subjectivity, and, meanwhile, the social conditions at large are free to remain unchanged. There is no impulse on the reader's part to go out and change them. In "*Ulysses* in History," Jameson develops these points into an attack not only on *Ulysses*, but on the entire tradition of symbolism in which he claims it is implicated. He starts by referring to "the modern" or modernity as involving a crisis, a dissociation between meaning and existence. His authority is Roland Barthes on the mythic opposition between "the lived experience and the intelligible." Jameson extends this opposition into an attack on symbolism as such. Symbolism, he says, involves "the illicit transformation of existing things into so many invisible or tangible meanings." If nature has now been transformed into culture, and if cultural events and artifacts are still felt as meaningless, then it is absurd to endow any of them with an aura of value.

The trouble with these essays by Jameson and by Bersani is that they can't deal with any form of language that doesn't resolve itself immediately into either subjectivity or objectivity. They are victims of the rhetoric of either/or. That is why neither Bersani nor Jameson can read the "Eumaeus" or the "Ithaca" episodes of *Ulysses*. The question is: is there another linguistic theory that might enable us to communicate with Bersani and with Jameson on this issue? My own view is that there is such a theory and that it is adumbrated in Gilles Deleuze and Félix

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Guattari's book, *A Thousand Plateaus*. I'll quote two passages from it:

> If language always seems to presuppose itself, if we can't assign it a nonlinguistic point of departure, it is because language does not operate between something seen or felt and something said, but always goes from saying to saying. We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else has said to you: hearsay. It does not ever suffice to invoke a vision distorted by passion. The first determination of language is not the trope or metaphor but indirect discourse. The importance which some have accorded metaphor and metonymy proves disastrous for the study of language. Metaphor and metonymy are merely effects.They are a part of language only when they presuppose indirect discourse.

The second passage will make that one a little clearer:

> The social character of enunciation is intrinsically founded only if one succeeds in demonstrating how enunciation in itself implies collective assemblages. It then become clear that the statement is individuated and enunciation subjectified only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so. It is for this reason that indirect discourse – especially free indirect discourse – is of exemplary value. There are no clear, distinctive contours. What comes first is not an insertion of variously individuated statements or an interlocking of different subjects of enunciation, but rather a collective assemblage resulting in the determination of relative subJectification proccedings or assignments of individuality and their shifting distributions within discourse.

If Bersani were to take seriously the linguistic theory which Deleuze and Guattari propound, he would have no difficulty in reading either the "Ithaca" or the "Eumaeus" chapter, and I think he might perhaps have written with more justice and more delicacy about the novel as a whole. There is no need to choose between subjectivity and objectivity, or to enforce an invidious political conclusion upon the choice.

The merit of Robert Alter's paper is that there issues from it a delighted response to literature, to the pleasures of literature. He calls us back to the distinctive pleasure of being among words. I would finish, though, with a certain misgiving. Early on in his paper, he referred to possible links with "extraliterary reality." Towards the end, he refers to criteria that belong to an "extraliterary agenda." I'm no longer sure what those two phrases mean or what the justification for them might

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be. Thank you.

William Phillips: Steven Marcus.

Steven Marcus: I'm going to stand up, on the grounds that my standing up puts me on about the same level as Denis Donoghue sitting down. Although we did not consult at all, Denis Donoghue and I seem to have made a division of labor because I will talk about the first part of Robert Alter's paper, rather than the second.

I want first of all to express my general agreement with the points that Robert Alter makes in his excellent paper, and to underscore the circumstance that we are dealing with matters that are profoundly academic in the sense that they are taking place within the context of university life, organization, constraints, and culture. And in this connection, I would like to slightly augment and modify some of the elements in his description of the three waves of literary scholars or professors of literature that he has designated as characterizing, typically, the teaching and writing academic cadre of departments of language and literature in America in the twentieth century.

The first group were scholars who by and large, or at least frequently, had a kind of secondary interest in literature. Their primary preoccupation tended often to be in some other discipline or early technology that they would apply to literary materials; the history of a genre; linguistic or philological analysis; the study of sources, influences, and variations; the establishment of reliable texts; the direct influence and illuminating explanatory power of biographical data on important literature; and the specialized study of minor or lesser literary works during rather narrowly specified historical periods. Their largely unreflective and unsystematic positivism occasionally gave way when questions of value were brought forward, at which juncture some version of half-remembered or diluted Matthew Arnold was likely to be offered as a rationale for literary study. Yet these male teachers were scholars, as their books, articles, notes, and footnotes let others know. What they also let others know was that at least, in their view, there was something, somehow, to know, and that in their relatively undeveloped scientistic way they respected both this knowledge and at the same time acknowledged that there was a good deal that they did not know.

The second group were on the whole not academic, either by contrast, by early experience, or by intellectual allegiance. There was, for a time, a kind of semiserious war in which they tended to figure as critics as opposed to the older scholars whom they were replacing, both by virtue of their more salient intellectual interests and their age. Many of them came to the academy through a variety of circuitous routes, and

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they were as a rule less genteel than the professors they succeeded. They were also, and most importantly, affected by and committed to both modernism in the arts and thought and to contemporary literature and culture, in ways and senses that differed strikingly from their predecessors, who more often than not were either bewildered by or opposed to modernism. It was in fact largely by means of modernism in general, that ranged from the late nineteenth century to what was then the present, that this new group of literary instructors established themselves. And it was through the modernisms that they undertook the rereading and reinterpretation of the literature, art, and thought of the past that the same modernisms both required and made possible. That is to say, this new group of professors of literature not only introduced the study of modern literature and modernist culture as a whole into the academy; it also had as part of its general program the institutionalization of the methods, the tastes and sensibilities that the various modernisms entailed into the analytic study of modern literature and culture themselves, as well as the applications of the results of such projects to the literature and culture of the past. This was serious business seriously undertaken, and the consequences were far-reaching, both in the universities and in the literary and reading communities of educated people outside of the academy. Those consequences also included the education and apprenticeship of many of the better-known academic literary figures of the current wave of university literary personnel, whom Robert Alter describes as the "third wave" of literary scholars.

This third wave in a number of interesting analogical ways, or at certain pitches of discourse, resembles the first cohort of literary scholars more than it does the second. To begin with, these newer scholars have been bred to the academy, and they regard themselves as belonging primarily to a profession, the professoriate. They tend to be highly specialized and, like their academic precursors that the second wave replaced, write pieces and books that more often than not are recondite, abstruse, fairly abstract, and frequently very learned about a relatively narrow field of discourse or knowledge. These writings proceed with the help of much technical jargon, are heavily footnoted, and assume special, often arcane or esoteric knowledge on the part of their presupposed-to-be extremely small but important readership – there is more often than not no presumption about an audience or readership that is in any realizable sense extra-academic. This sense of confinement within professional, academic personae is to my mind magnified or intensified by the circumstance that, unlike their teachers and immediate predecessors, they do not have and have not had the original or chronologically firsthand experience of a movement and a literature like modernism on which to float their intellectual lives and which might have provided the substance –

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personal, literary, conceptual, and critical – out of which their own individual, critical perspectives might with originality and freshness be built. The more or less complete incorporation of the modernisms into the university curriculum and sensibility, along with the exhaustive analyses of all the great modernist tendencies, submovements, and works, has left this third wave without much new and extremely innovative or primarily creative work upon which to labor and by means of which the past might be altered and reconfigured once again. One can add to this decline in the new dimensions and fresh ranges of reference of literary critical discourse an analogous change in Anglo-American philosophical discourse in the last half-century. With a few notable exceptions, one finds there generally and on the whole increasing technicality, specialization, fragmentation, and academic professionalization, and hence one discovers therein parts of another perspective on the deepening confinement of scope in the languages of the intellectual community at large – that community which includes both the professoriate and intellectually interested extra-academic groups of people, readers, students, and members of other professions.

Although we are talking in a general, formal way about the current academic left, some though not all of them identifiable as postmodernists or poststructuralists, I have at the same time no wish to totalize or absolutize or to simplify their complexity of composition. Many different groups and interests exist among them; some of these associations are by now several intellectual generations old; there is plenty of dissonance and self-criticism not only between separate intellectual and ideological combinations of belief among them, but also within specific factions and denominations themselves as these undergo unavoidable development and intellectual and generational changes. They should not be regarded, intellectually, as monolithic, any more than the "humanists" who are often considered by many of them as the "enemy" make up or represent a unitary group, set of interests, or point of view, or, for that matter, agree upon a single, reviled "canon." However, another distinction can be generally made out between these groups and their modernist predecessors. Modernist art and thought as a whole tended to be culturally and formally radical and revolutionary, while politically it was very diverse and often inclined to be self-contradictory and sometimes conservative, or at least antidemocratic in an antipopulist and antimodern/industrial sense.

The extreme preoccupation with power that we see among academic literary scholars today is in some measure an expression of their deep involvement in the life of the professoriate; it is also in another degree a substitute formation for the radicalism and subversive power that modernism when it was fresh brought to the culture; and it is in addi-

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tion, simultaneously, partly an expression of the bitterness of defeat in a larger political arena, as well as a residuum of earlier positive experiences in that arena. Finally it also represents a response to the circumstance that some of these teachers often regard themselves as not being on the same side as literature, especially if culture is primarily conceived of as the scene of a displaced struggle for political power or discursive hegemony in some ultimately political sense. Furthermore, it is not surprising to see, as one frequently does, a political will to radicalism consorting with cultural naivete or tastelessness – or arguments defending some of the less interesting and more unsavory productions of popular culture in the name of putative political pluralism or subversion or emancipation. And at last, it too can be antidemocratic in the sense that some of its adherents regularly regard liberal or pluralist democracy as little more than disguised means of American/Western oppression, racism, and other familiar reprehensions.

What I am saying, among many other things, is that in its own way academic criticism or theory has tried to take the place as a force for negation and liberation that modernist thought and culture once occupied, and that this effort is in part self-contradictory. Some of this contradictoriness, I believe, has to do with the extremely academic nature of many of the phenomena involved, though this consideration does not exclusively hold. Nevertheless, I do not know how to explain otherwise the circumstance that the last bastions of Marxism in the West will probably be certain departments of English literature in America and Britain – and I sometimes fancy them as Lenin's last stand.

There are one or two points that Robert Alter makes toward the end of his paper that I should, in conclusion, like to take him up on – although these points are contravened by remarks he makes elsewhere. In his defense of Joyce and *Ulysses* against recent detractors, he praises the novel's "mimetic" powers, in particular the "compelling characters" of Bloom and Molly, "because they are such splendidly individual, experientially substantial representations" of two great human types. And he correlatively criticizes those who ban or bless on "the basis of criteria that belong to an extraliterary agenda." This doesn't seem to me entirely compelling, since the invocation of mimetic power and the successful realization of individual representations also entail ideas and qualities that have to do with conceptions of "life" and "experience" and "reality" and "representationality" – that is to say, ideas that cannot be altogether subsumed beneath literary categories, but refer to certain more inclusive conceptions. I do not think that this conclusion or consequence can be altogether escaped or avoided, nor, in some sense, should it be.

What this circumstance entails is that such problems have an irreducible moral dimension. When we ascribe literary value to *Antigone* or

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King Lear or *War and Peace*, we are asserting, I believe, that we are not merely foisting or projecting value onto such works, but discerning or recognizing value in them as well – and that this value is not simply a displaced rendering of our own complicity in Western civilization's plot to oppress most of humankind. We are also saying, I surmise, that this literary merit cannot be separated from a number of extraliterary judgments that have to do with our estimation of certain goods in life and experience. Our regard for these qualities – such as the preferable excellence, for example, in certain situations, of complexity and multiplicity of the awareness of competing values themselves – is in the long run a matter of faith. Its truth cannot be proved. But then, again, neither can the value of the study of literature be proved – and there are some today who have articulated doubts about the continued worthiness of such study. I do not agree with them, even in these embattled times; but that, too, is a matter of faith.

William Phillips: Thank you, Steven. Robert Alter, would you like to reply to some of the comments?

Robert Alter: First, I'd like to thank Steve Marcus for very usefully filling in my very sketchy overview of the three waves of literary scholars and reminding us all of something that I assumed but didn't spell out - of course, no wave (including the present one) is monolithic. There are gradations, internal divisions, even generational oppositions, as you proposed. Now, the real stickler here for both my respondents is the notion of "extraliterary reality." I'd like to come back to that. But first, just a few words to Denis Donoghue. I did say at the outset that I didn't want to pick too easy a target, that I was choosing the work of critics who were intelligent, where things were going on that were worth contending with. I certainly didn't mean to read either of them out of the profession by disagreeing with them. I also concur in what Denis Donoghue says, that this is by no means the whole range of the available current critical discussion about *Ulysses*, although most of the figures you mentioned are rather older and a couple of them already dead and buried. But in fact, I was reminded of something that Frederick Crews noted in a recent essay about the current study of American literature. He observes that there is some really fine work going on among scholars, including scholars of the new generation, who are single-author specialists. In other words, your Hawthorne specialist or your Melville specialist is not necessarily following one of the isms that I was talking about and may be doing very good things in illuminating the works of a particular author. In terms of the prestige network of the profession - and this is something we often lose sight of - the people who are in the spotlight

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generally are not the single-author scholars but the others. The one respect in which (I'm almost coming to that term that I'm afraid of, "extraliterary") I probably differ from Denis Donoghue is that I actually see a serious difference in level between the Bersani paper and the Jameson paper and in fact between Bersani's work in general and Jameson's work. That is, I'm glad that the Bersani essay, "Against *Ulysses*," was written even though I disagree with substantial parts of it – because it raises rather challenging questions about *Ulysses* and about the uses of literature. And it makes you think twice and three times, and this is certainly one of the purposes of intellectual discourse. The Jameson essay, quite frankly, I find to be a Marxist meat grinder. It seems to me crushingly reductive, I'm even tempted to say that it's a reflection of bad faith in performing a kind of pseudorevolutionary gesture at the expense of *Ulysses*. It begins with a dedication to those who have perished in the fight for freedom in Northern Ireland, presumably the I.R.A. terrorists, and it speaks of *Ulysses* (in a passage I didn't quote) as a work about the effects of colonialism. It seems to me this does not advance the discussion of *Ulysses*. That is, it's a gesture by someone who is not really revolutionary but has the gestures of revolutionary politics on the brain.

Now to the awkward business of "extraliterary agendas." It's an uncomfortable term. I suppose I used it in the two places that I used it, *faute de mieux*, because I couldn't think of another way to put it. That is, I'm less uneasy about my first usage, when I said that one of the things that literary theory does is to ponder what might be the possible connections between literature and extraliterary reality. Now we know, of course, that reality outside of literature, outside of the arts, is contaminated by our artistic representations of it. This is not news. Nevertheless, I think that there is a difference between the book that I hold up and read, which might be about anything, and feeling the rain stinging me in the face as I walk outside, or somebody whom I know dying from a sudden disease. And because there are manifold philosophical problems, we don't have a comfortable term for referring to all that's not on the pages of the book. That was my awkward fumble for it, but I don't think it was conceptually wrong. Now, my second use of "extraliterary," where I criticize people like Bersani for having an "extraliterary agenda," is conceptually suspect. I concede this to both my critics, although I'll explain what I had in mind, and maybe in a lucky moment I can think of another way of putting it. It is suspect for the following reasons. Of course, as Steven Marcus remarked, there is no such thing (as we all know by this time) as an innocent reading of literature; we always bring various kinds of agendas to it. So if Leo Bersani were here, he would no doubt point out to me that I have my own agendas. For example, I seem to value the individual self, and as I think Steven also indicated, I

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value something like complexity. Okay, I grant that, and therefore it needs rewording. But let me explain briefly what was in my mind in putting down that awkwardly phrased idea. It might virtually be the difference, I'd say, between a value and an agenda. In other words, I openly confess, and without the slightest embarrassment, that the individual self is a bedrock value of mine. For that reason, let's say, when one of my friends a number of years ago became the follower of an Indian guru it gave me the heebiejeebies, precisely because the surrender of the individual self was involved. I don't think that the way I go about reading literature is such that I subject all literary texts to the requirements of the "canon" – a term Roger Shattuck rightly criticized yesterday for having been introduced by those critical of what we have been studying up until now. I argue that such critics are much more interested in canon, in the ecclesiastical sense, than people in literature have been up until now. I don't believe that with my value of the individual self I subject all literature to a canonical inquisition and rule works as authentic and inauthentic on that basis. It seems to me that this is what tends to happen among many of the third-wave critics. Leo Bersani on *Ulysses* is a case in point. For those of you who are interested in seeing in greater detail what he has in mind about the dissolution of the self, which in fact for him seems to be a redemptive idea, I suggest that you look at his essay that appeared in *October* last year, "The Rectum As Grave?", an essay on AIDS. Like everything Leo writes, it has some extremely interesting things in it but in the end proposes a redemptive vision of the breaking-down of the borders of the self, the dissolution of the self into some kind of pure, orgiastic experience as a way of breaking out of all the traps of our culture. Now once you have a real vision like that, you begin to talk about which books are, as the church fathers and the early rabbis did, to be read as authentic literature and which are not.

My question, Denis, is: I haven't read the Deleuze and Guattari. The two passages you quote sound more than a little like Bakhtin, whose view of language I find quite helpful in thinking about novels like *Ulysses*, and I wonder if that's true.

Denis Donoghue: The merit of the Deleuze and Guattari book is that to some extent it gets us out of the difficulty of having to regard speech as in every respect an inaugural act, an act made possible only by some notion of self-assertion. I might make a marginal comment on what Robert Alter has just said: I began to wonder whether he and I are fundamentally in disagreement when he took a sidelong glance at his friend who became an Indian guru. To become a guru might indeed, for the particular person in question, be a most profound act of the self, taking the form of what T. S. Eliot and others have called "self-surrender." Self-

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surrender I would not regard as at all the same thing spiritually as capitulation. One of the things the self can do is indeed to surrender itself to something it regards as greater. So we're probably in more fundamental disagreement about the notion of the self than I have assumed. I, too, wish to retain it, but I want to give it a different destiny than the one Robert Alter gives it. I would be dismayed if I thought the only thing a self could do would be to engage in various acts of insistence, of self-insistence. But I can see that that's a large-scale and tendentious issue.

Steven Marcus: It seems to me that it's precisely self-surrender that one does not see in a majority of these third-wave critics.

Denis Donoghue: Well, at the same time, Steven, to some extent I regret that Robert Alter used the phrase "bad faith," because as I get older I'm less and less inclined to ascribe bad faith to my colleagues.

StevenMarcus: I didn't mean bad faith. I just said self-surrender is what one doesn't see, as you indicated. That is to say, one of the things that is very interesting to have seen - not universally, of course, but as a tendency in literary commentary or theorizing or criticism, is the positioning of the eye of the critic as the center of the activity and the displacement of the text or the work of art to the margins of the discourse, and the replacement of that particular form of discourse by this other one, in which that performing eye or acting eye or writing eye negotiates itself. That was what I was calling attention to.

Denis Donoghue: I'm thinking of specific instances. For example, Steven Marcus implied that the third wave of critics exert themselves on a relatively narrow range of writing, and I began to wonder about that. I'm really not sure that it is true of the major critics. In Paul de Man's books, for instance – his work on Rilke, Kant, Proust, and many other writers – there is an edifying arduousness, nothing trivial or narrow. There are difficult, slow, hard essays. They are morally edifying. I have the same feeling when Jacques Derrida writes about Plato, Hegel, Kant, and Mallarmé. Again, these are thoroughly authentic, morally exacting essays. They in no way demean our profession. I certainly do not feel that these writings are narcissistic. I'm taking that word from myself, Steven, not from you; you didn't use it.

Steven Marcus: No, it seems that you've picked the two best cases in Derrida and de Man in which to make your point. And I feel that there're a fairly rapid dropping off after those two, because they are exemplary in exactly the sense that you talked about. So let me make a

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second point. I think that what Bob was saying, what he really meant by an extraliterary agenda, was a kind of ideological program – an ideological program which has behind it some kind of political program or even a political test for certain kinds of art or literature or critical activity. I think that contention has a certain validity. At the same time, it seems to me, when applying that notion to our own selves, one finds when reading literature and beginning to judge it and respond to it in a positive and negative way, that one holds predispositions toward valuing and disvaluing things, which are not simply formal, but which have ideological bearings or implications ultimately; because they have to do with values that cannot be exclusively defined by literature. So it seems to me that the values that are at work here, although they're less direct than the ones you are talking about when you speak of an ideological agenda, nevertheless do have extraliterary force and that's what makes arguments about literature lively and meaningful.

William Phillips: I can't help observing, Denis, that T. S. Eliot, despite his remark about self-surrender, imposed his own self (or mind) most forcibly on the modern literary and intellectual scene. He didn't surrender that.

Denis Donoghue: I think the phrase "self-surrender," as Eliot used it, means self-surrender to God. It was perfectly compatible with Eliot's having opinions on Donne.

William Phillips: All I'm suggesting is that he surrendered rather incompletely.

Lionel Abel: To begin with, I would like to note that I solidarize myself with Denis's judgment of those pieces by Derrida and de Man. I think we have to admit certain intellectual values in that work. But I strongly support what Robert Alter said about the imposition of the extraliterary on the study of literary works. I do think the term extraliterary is understandable in the context in which Robert Alter used it. And I would call his attention to Augustine's remark that we know what time means when someone asks us the time, but if someone asks us "what is time?" we do not know what we mean by the word. So I don't think it fair to raise that kind of philosophical inquisition with respect to the term "extraliterary."

Another point I would like to make relates to something that Bersani said about Joyce. He too implies a great reverence for the human personality in Joyce's presentation of his characters. I'm surprised there was no reference made to Nabokov's very fine essay on *Ulysses*: he

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pointed out that the extraordinary feature of *Ulysses* is that Joyce first presents his characters in the round, the way a novelist might have, but then cuts them up as the Cubists cut up the objects they painted. So, in fact, the accusation by Bersani is quite false. In Joyce's novel you find both the nineteenth-century approach to character and the twentieth-century preference for dissection of character.

Finally, on the question of self-surrender: I'm not sure how Denis meant it, but it seems to me that the real difference between an Eastern view of the human being and of human experience and a Western view would be the one that was expressed by Max Scheler: self-surrender is the surrender of the self because it is the surrender of experience. We like games whether we win or lose, even though losing a game is painful. But the Eastern view is, if you want to avoid pain, don't play the game at all. And that is the surrender of the self. So I think it's not right to describe a Westerner who has adopted the Buddhist faith as someone who is acknowledging a higher being and has surrendered himself to that. The Buddhist view is that you are escaping the sufferings intendant upon having a self.

Catharine Stimpson: I simply want to make three very quick points of fact, and then ask a question of the panel. The first point of fact is that I think Gerald Graff's history of the profession, *Professing Literature*, offers a very good nineteenth-century background to the quarrels in American literary criticism. In effect what Graff does is to show us the shores from which these three waves rolled. And I might also say about the three waves that, like all human activities, they had their imperfections. I would trust that when you describe, Professor Alter, the three waves you might discuss even more fully some of their imperfections, including those of the "third wave." The second point of fact: I've heard in the last day-and-a-half a lot of statements about English departments. I'd like to remind us all very briefly of what the average English department is like - an English department at the University of Texas, Arlington, or Emerson College, or Cal. State/Longbeach, or Southern Illinois University. It is a middle-of-the-road place, pluralistic, using the *Norton Anthology*, using it seriously, using it conscientiously, spending most of its time teaching writing and composition, and feeling within the university as a whole marginalized because of the place of the humanities in general in American life. My hunch is that despite the differences in this room, we should unite on a general defense of literacy and a general defense of the humanities within our higher social and cultural orders. Third point of fact: specialization among literature professors cannot be taken out of context; this is not an immaculate activity, a conspiracy of literature professors who sat down in a West End café as graduate students and

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said: we're going to specialize and destroy the world. It is a part of the larger development of the modern research university. The specialization in English departments is often the consequence of tenure committees which, in many universities, are dominated by the scientific model of intellectual excellence. We can't talk about the development of literary studies without placing it in the larger context of the reward structure of higher education. I thank you for your patience. My question to the panel: where do you place that extraordinary figure, Harold Bloom?

Robert Alter: First, I appreciate your three points and am pretty much in agreement with them. That is, I always find it hard to get a mental picture of what really is happening with people called "the profession." Because if you go (as I try not to) to the MLA meetings and you see these thousands and thousands of professors (since I'm giving you a catalogue of my phobias, one being the dissolution of the self, another is mobs), I think a lot of the generalizations we've been floating here, about what's happening in the so-called academy, tend to mean maybe twenty, perhaps thirty institutions in the country. And I think that if you go, not only to the kinds of institutions you mentioned but let's say to small, excellent liberal arts colleges like Carlton College in Minnesota or wherever, the picture is more variegated and sometimes looks very different. Certainly we are all committed to literacy and doing whatever little we can to mitigate the marginalization of the humanities. I am entirely in agreement that specialization reflects larger social and economic developments. In fact, that's precisely why I choose the word "technocrat" to describe some aspects of the professional identity literary scholars now seek to achieve.

All three of us probably ought to respond to the Harold Bloom question. I have read Harold Bloom with considerable interest over the years and, as a few of you know, just wrote a review essay of *The Book of J* which appears in the current issue of *Commentary*. I think Harold Bloom is very hard to categorize because he is so extravagantly individual. Having professed my allegiance to individualism, I can't altogether denounce him. It does seem to me that there is something fresh and invigorating in a lot of what he's written, but he often makes claims that to me are not very sustainable. I think the whole conception of Oedipal conflict and more or less willfull misreading and power struggle, as an explanation for all literary expression, is drastically overstated and doesn't explain a lot of the cases one would want to explain. His most recent book seems to be a kind of beguiling edifice built on a foundation of sand, because about half the claims he makes for the identity of J are based on things invented by David Rosenberg in his atrocious translation, not based on the original Hebrew which, despite claims to the contrary,

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it is quite clear Harold Bloom can't read.

Steven Marcus: I am more or less in agreement with what Catharine Stimpson has said about what's being done at various institutions in America and in English departments. I think what I was doing was describing leading tendencies rather than trying to be exhaustive in my description of an extremely variegated whole. Now, on the question of specialization. Of course, one has to exclude certain major figures, but in general it seems to me quite true to say that there's a steady and increasing tendency toward specialization, toward knowing more and more about less and less, and that the intellectual division of labor in the academic world is modeled upon earlier divisions of labor in the nonacademic and nonintellectual world. Now, it seems to me, one can't be too simple about such specialization, although sometimes one has very simple emotions about it. I think one has to be ambivalent, in part because it is a two-sided problem. One-author scholars who devote their lives to a single author or even a single work often come up with things that no one else could. Max Weber in his great essay, "Science as a Vocation" described what the extreme strangeness of being a scholar and devoting your life to things of this sort is like. Yet certain kinds of results can be produced only by this kind of dedication and distortion of one's being. On the one hand, we recognize that if you do not specialize, in some sense you suffer the liability or the danger of being superficial and of not knowing what you're talking about. On the other hand, we all know what can be and has been said against specialization, against narrowness of vision. So it seems to me that one can't take a simplified view about specialization; I think we were really speaking in shorthand.

On Harold Bloom: I think Robert Alter's recent essay is extremely good. I do think Bloom's early works are simply marvelous: his book on Shelley's myth-making; the book on the Romantic poets, *The Visionary Company*. These are marvelous fresh readings. At the time nobody had read some of this material in the way that he did – as also, for example, in his book on Wallace Stevens. It seems to me that that kind of unambiguous praise has to be qualified as soon as he begins to take off on his very original, provocative, and interesting theories, starting with *The Anxiety of Influence*, in which he seems to me to simplify and misread (in his own, creative way but nevertheless to misread) Freud, for example. He had a very simplified reading of what the Oedipal struggle or the Oedipal situation is like, and it seems to me to become too much of an overarching and intruding model into his reading of literature. I find that his work after that does not have the freshness and revelatory character that his earlier readings of poetry did have.

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Denis Donoghue: Well, I have little to add. On Harold Bloom, one interesting thing he told me recently was that his favorite critics are Ruskin, A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, and Harold Goddard.

David Thorburn: I'm from MIT. I have one observation about Harold Bloom in answer to Catharine's question. It seems to me there is a rather close connection in certain ways, a kind of fundamental linkage between certain forms of contemporary ideological criticism and Bloom's position - not that Bloom would be pleased to acknowledge this - which has to do with the theory of misprision. I think that when a critic of Bloom's stature celebrates a notion of misinterpretation as a form of creative behavior, what he sanctions is an indifference to the text, an indifference to the structures of understanding that the text and the author before us propose. In other words, I think that Bloom's criticism - and especially the criticism that comes at the point after *The Anxiety of Influence* - is profoundly linked to the relative disinterest that a great many contemporary critics show toward the ostensible objects of their inquiry; that Bloom sanctions a carelessness about the details of the text, even encourages the notion, as both Robert Alter and Steven Marcus suggested in different ways in their talks to us, that the commentator is in fundamental ways superior to the text and can work various kinds of magic upon it. I think there are ways of understanding Bloom from his own perspective. But it has always struck me that as Harold Bloom has gotten older, he has more and more seen himself not as a conventional critic but as a kind of Nietzsche – which sanctions behaving in that way. This seems to me a disastrous agenda for academic or scholarly activity.

Yet I want to call attention to an issue that I think was embedded or implied in both Robert Alter's and Steven Marcus's remarks, and perhaps also in Denis Donoghue's: It has to do in part with the problematic status of what we broadly call modernism. We all recognize that the notion that modernism is a monolith is of course a mistake, an error, but we often talk about modernism as if its lineaments were accessible in some essentially monolithic way. And it seems to me that the crucial intuition or insight that was at least implied in several remarks by the panel is that modernism as a movement involves fundamentally different political and ideological positions. We might, for instance in Joyce scholarship, see the difference between the school of Ellman and the school of Kenner – in which Joyce was seen as a kind of partner to T. S. Eliot in the enterprise of exposing the "waste land" conditions of the modern world. Eliot was largely responsible for that perspective because in his early review of *Ulysses* he imperially embraced the text as an embodiment of his own principles. Of course, as later generations of critics and scholars have shown, the affirmative and anti-apolcalyptic character of *Ulysses* is

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wholly at odds with the ideological and moral sensibility that lie behind texts like "Prufrock" or "The Waste Land." And this distinction between the school of Eliot and the school of Joyce, or the school of Kenner and the school of Pound, seems to me a crucial one when we're thinking about what modern literature and modern art stand for, what they are. They all had what might be called a kind of radicalism of form, a structural radicalism, but a great many of them - and I think the classic instance is *Ulysses* itself - are profoundly conservative in content in certain ways. That's an insight that deserves much more attention, a recognition about the nature of "the modern" itself.

My final point has to do with the fact that modernism itself as a movement has at least one special characteristic: unlike many other literary artifacts that belong broadly to the intellectual culture we all share, many of these texts never had a life in the actual culture of their society; never, like Dickens or Shakespeare or other prior literary artists, had an existence in what we might call the marketplace, never had ordinary readers. That is to say that modernism - or at least many of the classic texts of modernism - overleaped that, they were written and then entered the museum; there was no intervening process whereby they lived an authentic life in the ordinary culture of society. It seems to me that distinction makes many of the modernist classics much more vulnerable than some of the older texts.

Edith Kurzweil: Kate Stimpson made most of my point, but I just want to add something which we seem to forget; that we are talking about the university at large, where "extraliterary" becomes nonliterary. For example, Bersani hardly is known outside departments of literature. For students, English is only part of their curriculum. However, Fredric Jameson, for example, is seen only in his political context – by political scientists and sociologists. Literary critics, it seems to me, ignore that he is an adherent of Althusserian Marxism, which is essentially a critique of the humanist young Marx, a reevaluation and extension of Marx's economic determinism, a critique of the state apparatus. That's one point I wanted to make. My other point is that I think Denis Donoghue's asking for the alternative linguistic theory as propounded by Deleuze and Guattari is a wonderful idea. But we must watch out for the fact that their notions again will become part of literary theory and then will not be taken in the way Guattarri and Deleuze intended them. In other words, I want to underline that when you think of the impact of all these people outside departments of literature, they are read for political content and for political ends – so that the literary context and all we know about Joyce and *Ulysses* is totally forgotten. Jameson is not read for that purpose.

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Ted Underwood: I have a very specific question to Denis Donoghue. You distinguished two modes of literature and two modes of talking about literature in a fascinating and tantalizing way. I'd like to know more about the symbolic mode – as it tends to appeal to interiority, to.subjectivity, the splendid concreteness of the work of art as an almost sacred object. I think in talking about Yeats and Thoman Mann you distinguished a mode that is political, that wants to take a critical or historical perspective, to use what a lot of people have been talking about today as an "extraliterary" agenda. But we might not point to someone modern like Jameson; we might take a more homey example like Lionel Trilling or even, I think, T. S. Eliot, who wanted to see literature as part of a larger historical pattern. So I think that's the second mode. Those two vocabularies tended to totalize themselves, but then you suggested that indirect discourse was a trope, or a way of unifying or transcending the difference. I'd like you to elucidate that.

Denis Donoghue: I'll try. My problem with a good deal of contemporary criticism is that the enforcement of overtly political considerations and values is premature. One's primary attention to a work of art should be esthetic, formal, and technical. If and when these considerations are fulfilled, then one ought to invoke values of a religious, political, theological, and economic character. If overt, ideological values are introduced too soon, the poem, or the novel, or the painting, or whatever it is, is simply not given its due in its own formal terms. Now it's very difficult to bring ultimate considerations to bear upon technical, formal, and esthetic analysis. I'm aware of that. I'm not implying that I have some degree of esthetic purity that is not available to others. But what I am looking for is some way (and this is why I invoked the *Thousand Plateaus* book) to release ourselves from a fixation upon questions of self, performance, and so on; and I think the collective emphasis that Deleuze and Guattari make is useful. But my feelings are very mixed. I would like, if it were possible, to do literature as mathematicians do mathematics; that is, I would actually know what I'm talking about. But I don't know what I'm talking about because I don't know the beginnings or the endings of the subject. The subject (literature) is a very impure, messy, distracting one. It's very difficult to do. That's about as close as I can come to an answer.

Robert Alter: Just one sentence: I love your formulation, and especially what you say about premature political intervention exactly expresses my unhappiness about some of the things going on.

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Ed Rothstein: My comment is about Robert Alter's distinction that he made earlier between agenda and point of view. To the extent that I know the works of the critics being discussed - particularly Jameson and Derrida - I think that one of the aspects of their very different agendas - it seems to me Paul de Man would probably fit in here as well - is that these critics see themselves in different ways as "progressive" - progressive meaning they see themselves as having a distinct role to play in the evolution of literature, criticism, and (in Jameson's case) history, itself. And Derrida probably would put himself there as well. He's not modest about his philosophical ambitions. This notion of progressive I think actually does come out of notions of history from the nineteenth century, and it probably draws upon many myths of the avant-garde in this century; in that sense probably none of the critics would be pleased to hear their views called "old-fashioned." But I think to a certain extent they actually are. It seems to me that there are risks - and I, like you, find much of value in their work, though I have to do a tremendous amount of work filtering out other things which I find tremendously distracting - in this "progressive" stance and everything that goes along with it, political views and philosophical views. The problem with the prestige that these critics have on campuses, I believe, is that when you are dealing with a progressive critic who is that adamant about his progressive role, then to a certain extent you're either with progress or you're against it; you're either moving in the right direction or you're moving in the wrong direction. And this creates acolytes and dissenters and splinters apart the intellectual community in a very serious way. And I'm making this generalization purely apart from the specific content of their stance.

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The Idea of the University

William Phillips: The main talk this morning will be given by Brigitte Berger, Professor of Sociology at Boston University, who has written widely on this session's topic and related subjects; one of her books is *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*. Nathan Glazer's most recent book is *The Limits of Social Policy*. He is Professor of Education and Sociology at Harvard University. Catharine Stimpson is Dean of the Graduate School at Rutgers University. Her most recent book is *Where the Meanings Are*.

Brigitte Berger: American colleges and universities are very different places today from what they were some forty years ago. In an amazingly brief period of time a variety of forces, both on the structural as well as on the intellectual level, combined to transform an institution cast in the traditional liberal mold. Structurally, the rapid expansion of higher education in the late fifties and sixties turned the college from an institution providing sheltered space to the nation's elite into "open universities" enjoined with the education of ever-larger portions of its citizenry. The simultaneously occurring expansion of once small and self-contained institutions of higher learning into research machines of awesome dimensions served to further augment an already profound structural transformation. In essence, it transformed the academic enterprise into a corporate entity breathtaking in its grasp of the principles of finance, in its capitalist daring and sheer rapacity. It also perilously widened the traditional gap between the dual functions of the university, that of general education and that of the graduate training of specialists in evermore narrowly defined fields of specialization.

The same period, almost by an historical accident, also witnessed the beginnings of a massive assault on the intellectual content of the classical liberal tradition. That tradition, with its emphasis on rationality, freedom, and empiricism, emerged from protracted struggles with earlier, more conservative positions during the past two centuries or so. On the one hand, we witnessed the beginnings of an attack on what since has come to be derogatorily called "the canon," and on the other, we observed a growing propensity among the professoriate to put into question the liberal consensus on theoretical propositions about the nature and purpose of scholarship. The attacks on "the canon" were primarily politically motivated revolts against the "hegemony" of the Western intellectual tradition and the cultural values it represents. The questioning of traditional liberal approaches to scholarship, their logic and rational analytical principles, may be seen partly as a quest to escape what Max

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Weber has called "the iron cage" of modernity, and partly as a perilous, though perhaps logical, consequence of the rational modes of cognition which are part and parcel of the liberal tradition of the Western academy. By extension, these attacks taken together must be understood as a virulent offensive against the social, political, and economic life of the Western world.

Today there exists wide agreement among the many observers of American higher education, both inside the university and without, that the shifts in the structure of higher education along with the politicization of its content in a "radical" mode, separately and together, have contributed to the much publicized crisis in the contemporary university. While all the parts of the traditional university may still be there, it is argued, they no longer add up to a genuine whole.

It has become customary to associate the assault against the American university as the bastion of "Eurocentric," "logocentric," bourgeois domination – white, male, and "phallocentric" – with the destructive politics of the sixties, the "tenured radicals" and their unprincipled sophistries. And it is amazing to observe how little attention has been paid to the fact that the attacks on the classical liberal tradition are today carried into the academic arena by very conservative segments of the professoriate as well. These attacks from the right provide evidence to the argument that the much-flaunted "conservative movement of the Reagan years" is not as monolithic as it appeared to be, just as they provide evidence to the proposition that to cast the university's current ideological battles in terms of "left" versus "right" simply will not do. A motley variety of Roman Catholic traditionalists, conservatives of the Anglo-Catholic variety, traditionalists of the new right, and remnant groups of Southern Agrarians have resurfaced in recent years and appear to be gaining momentum. Though informed by very different and often contradictory visions about the nature of knowledge and the purpose of the university, they are united in their animus against the classical liberal tradition. Rightly or wrongly, they feel liberals in the university have denied them a voice in the definition of American social reality. If one wants to understand the differences among these groups, it is useful to bear in mind that most conservatives view history as a decline from a past that was better than the present in at least some significant respects. The point where everything went wrong is variously located in time by different traditionalist groups, and they differ in the identification of the causes which have to be held responsible for the current malaise. Often deeply religious, they are irked by the hegemony of the "progressive secularist" claims of liberalism in the university and the public arena in general. Of late, they appear to be increasingly inclined to make common cause with politically more radical models scorning the liberal tradition,

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since they expect that conservative paradigms will receive greater credence in an academy no longer ruled by classical liberalism's rationalistic mode of cognition. In general, they tend to attribute all the ills of modern society to a modern culture created in a liberal mode, and in particular, they are concerned with "the evacuation of morality from higher education." In the minds of such critics as James T. Laney, George Parkin Grant, Brent Waters, and perhaps even Alisdaire MacIntyre of late, liberalism must be held responsible for the triumph of "bureaucratic individualism" as well as for the "instrumentalist" thrust of modern society which, they argue, has replaced the search for "the good," "the just," and ultimately, liberty itself.

As to be expected, the frontal assault on the traditional liberal academy from the radical left has been countered by a growing band of defenders of the classical liberal ideals, neoconservatives, libertarians, and free-marketers. These groups take great pride in the historic achievements of the liberal tradition, and although here too exist pronounced differences among individual proponents and the groups they identify with, they are united in their unshakable rejection of the debasement of scholarship by politics and their passionate embrace of academic freedom. They are ready to do battle against the "enemies of freedom" and the "epistemological radicals" of the left wherever they may be. Their classical liberal ideals have recently been restated by Chester Finn, who sees the American campus as a sanctuary in which "knowledge and truth might be pursued – and imparted – with impunity, no matter how unpopular, distasteful, or politically heterodox the process might sometimes be." They have not yet been able to face up to the charges against the liberal tradition advanced in ever stronger terms by their political allies on the right, and it will be interesting to watch how that debate will be conducted and where it will lead.

In sum, there can be little doubt that the American academy has become the battleground for the definition of reality. By its very nature the university provides a kind of "symbolic territory" over which different parties will compete. This has always been so, and it is likely to remain so in the future as well. More than merely academic interests are at stake here. Although all parties to the debate prefer to wage the battle in terms of philosophical ideals, they reflect larger visions, however vague and undefined they may be. It is for this reason that the passions of all the participants run so high; it is for this reason that battles among intellectuals on the American campus are more than battles for the minds of America's youth. What is at issue today is the self-understanding of the university, and beyond that, the legitimacy of the Western academic tradition and the cultural values upon which it rests.

It may be of some importance to recognize that the structural

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transformation of the university and the battles over the presuppositions of the classical liberal approach to knowledge are not unique to the United States. Similar shifts occurred in other Western societies within approximately the same time frame, and they followed similar patterns of assault and counterattack. In an almost uncanny fashion, the debates taking place in Paris, Frankfurt, London, and Amsterdam at one end of the globe appear to be a direct replication of those occurring at the other, at Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, and Michigan. The simultaneity of structural changes and the assault on the traditional liberal content of the Western university give credence to arguments that hold that much of what has occurred during the past decades should not be understood so much in terms of the predilections of particular individual actors or movements, but rather as a reflection of larger social and ideational processes that have been unleashed in the modern world. Moreover, it may be of some interest to observe that regardless of the very different perceptions and goals that distinguish the various factions in this debate, a rare consensus is achieved in the rock-bottom conviction common to all, that the current crisis in the culture of the university is but a mere reflection of a wide range of symptoms characteristic of a civilization in decline.

The inner-academic debate over "the heart and soul" of the American academy continues to be waged in highly factionalized battles which seem to be as perennial as they remain inconclusive. Over the years we have become accustomed to the face-offs between the proponents of the left and those of the right, jousting for the attention of an increasingly powerful media in equal measure. And we are likely to hear a lot more from traditionalist camps in the future. The lines of the debate have been firmly drawn on a great variety of academic topics; the positions aired have become as predictable as the cast, leaving little space for positions which cannot easily be subsumed under either. In fact, in this writer's opinion, the positions currently in vogue are in danger of becoming ossified and of thus being turned into cultural clichés.

Small wonder then that the American campus is not a happy place today. A sense of disorientation and loss of purpose permeates almost every aspect of the life of the academy. While the politicization of the academy is only all too real, there exists little doubt in my mind that other, equally important factors have also contributed to the profound shift in the culture of the university we have observed in recent years. If we are truly concerned with the future of the modern university as a legitimate and living institution, it will simply no longer do to reduce complicated processes to differences in political orientation alone.

I will attempt to explore in broad contours the interaction between structural and ideational shifts, which in a variety of ways have

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come to reinforce each other. Separately and together, they have led to a profound and, to my mind, perilous transformation in the culture of the classical liberal university. It goes without saying that the arguments I present here should be understood as points of departure for future discussions, rather than as a systematic and polished analysis of the phenomena themselves.

It is interesting to note that the structural shifts in the university and their manifest consequences have provoked comparatively little dispute. This is the more remarkable in view of the cataclysmic changes they have produced. As a first point of departure, let us briefly look at the consequences resulting from the shift in the student body. It has been widely recognized that with the expansion of the demand for higher education in the wake of World War Two, the undergraduate college designed in an earlier age to provide – as the saying went – "the channel through which the company of educated men and women necessarily passed" was transformed into a mechanism for providing entrance tickets to occupations and professions and thereby, it was hoped, to status, power, and affluence. With the spreading recognition that education forges the key to wealth and power, a utilitarian thrust previously absent, at least to the degree manifest today, was introduced into higher education. Ever more concerned with the certification of professionals, with the practical and commercially applicable, an earlier gentlemanly ethos lost its functionality. That old gentleman's ethos – with "its ideal of meritocracy and its somewhat hypocritical practice of the old boys network," to use James Laney's description – was replaced by a mad scramble for grades and promotion and a search for practically "useful" instruction. One has only to look at the current professional literature to see how this shift coalesced to fundamentally undermine the values of the traditional liberal arts education. The perusal of this type of literature lets us conclude beyond the shadow of a doubt that there no longer exists a consensus regarding the content and the purpose of undergraduate education. Opinions range from the advocacy of providing liberal arts courses to providing professional preparation, vocational skills, continuing education, and quasi-entertainment through film and sports. As could be expected, along with the loss of intellectual coherence, the possibility of the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, without regard for its later payoff, had to fall by the wayside. Opportunities for sustained thought, capable of habituating students with ways of being and seeing, and thereby socializing them into an ethos of shared values, was shortchanged as well.

To be sure, the much-acclaimed traditional ethos also instilled establishment assumptions about privilege, power, and social status, as critics never tire of stressing. But it was designed, at least in theory, to guide students toward self-knoweldge and habits of self-mastery. Beyond that, it

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aimed to instill a sense of responsibility for the public good. In the shift toward a more "open university," American higher education was compelled to demonstrate the utility of a college education. Moral and philosophical questions, perhaps perforce, came to be and continue to be deemphasized. In their place issues of rights and contract began to be of primary concern, and the academy has yet to come to terms with the consequences (such as affirmative action, the standardization of instruction, and so on) flowing from the redefinition of education in legal terms. To do justice to the new demands and to provide the broadest possible coverage of "relevant" courses to a student body with very different aims, the curriculum exploded. How these "offerings" could be integrated into a meaningful curriculum was beyond anyone's power to imagine. It has often been observed that today's undergraduate curriculum, with its almost limitless pluralism of courses, resembles an educational cafeteria offering a bland, prepackaged multiplicity of offerings to hurried and fickle patrons.

The new thrust permeating college education since the sixties contributed in no small measure to aggravate another problem of long standing: the gap between undergraduate and graduate education. Since the establishment of the modern American university a century ago, academic leaders have been engaged in perennial disputes over the dual functions of the university, that of the transmission of knowledge in contradistinction to its advancement. While it had been early recognized that there exists a profound difference between the generalized and synthetic nature of college education and the specialized, highly analytical focus of graduate education and research, the view that strong research contributes to good teaching and is perhaps indispensable to it came to prevail. The proponents of liberal arts education argued that the university's emphasis on problem-solving and practical research separates precisely what the generalizing thrust of undergraduate education is capable of drawing together, as the two need and feed each other in a fortuitous manner. Yet the issue of their divisive interaction has never been resolved, and in any case, in view of the growing trend toward specialization in our society at large, it cannot be resolved in such a facile manner.

During the period under review, the problem of the dual functions resurfaced with a vengeance. With the progressive dissolution of the consensus on the unity of knowledge and the new demands for the instrumental value of instruction, education in the "open university" was saddled with the worst of two worlds. Evermore compelled to give emphasis to the practical as well as to issues of political activism forced upon frequently unsuspecting students by a variety of instigators, ignorant of the complexities of modern research and the limitations of highly specialized research findings, and bereft of integrating models with which

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they could attempt to make sense of the vast accumulation of information, college education for many was thus turned into an empty, quasi-ritualistic enterprise. Often abysmally underprepared students were taught by highly specialized instructors in survey courses that were tagged onto the curriculum in response to the territorial requirements of the disciplines they represented. Instead of gaining an inkling about how all that specialized knowledge and that mass of information could be drawn together and integrated into interpretational schemes that would allow them to make sense of it all, students increasingly went through the motions of mastering materials promptly forgotten once they left the classroom. Proponents of "distribution requirements," that administrative mechanism of last resort which assures academic disciplines their share – and thereby their *raison d'etre* – in the college curriculum, typically make the error of equating broad coverage with true unity. On the other hand, highly-trained instructors specializing in very narrow fields of expertise, came to see undergraduate teaching as a chore to be circumvented in any way possible. In a different vein, some have argued that a progressive encroachment of ignorance appears to be an inevitable concomitant of the expanding horizon of science. The massive expansion of its research activities, moreover, brought the university into an increasing state of dependency on outside funding. It made large research institutions increasingly hungry for support and brought the federal government and its bizarre regulations onto the campus.

The "expressive revolution" of the sixties provides a further point of departure for our analysis. It is a point of departure that figures prominently among critics today, and there is little need to replicate the many persuasive treatises this aspect has received in recent years. Suffice it to observe that expressive potentials and expansionist tendencies are peculiar features of any modern liberal society. Though for a long time contained within firmly established institutional structures, they were unleashed by a constellation of forces in the sixties and subsequently unfolded their lethal dynamic. Along with a variety of institution-challenging interpretational schemes such as Marxian liberationisms and misunderstood Freudianisms, whose appeal has to be understood against wider processes of changes at work in modern society, those of demography figure prominently.

At the heart of the counterculture, we find a single-minded, often fanatical onslaught on boundaries and structures, a crusade to release infinite, expressive modes of being and cognition into the world of everyday life. The counterculture also supplied the Children of Caliban, to use W. H. Auden's revealing metaphor, with a matrix of consciousness in which the liberal values of rationality, hard work, efficiency, reliance upon structures typical of the modern university and the entire Western

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world itself, appeared as intolerable evils to be destroyed. While the storm troopers of the counterculture have long since disappeared and the more extreme of their radical claims no longer attract the blanket endorsement they once did, the antirational cognitive style of that culture has managed to survive in many ways. If there ever truly was a counterculture, it certainly ceased to be so by the mid-seventies as many of its characteristic messages were appropriated by the mainstream culture. More than any place else, however, the antirationalist tenets of the counterculture managed to survive in the academy. Here left unchecked by the harsh realities of the ordinary world, they continue to flourish and expand. There are virtually no intellectuals in the academy today who are not in the heart of their hearts antistructuralist and infected by the bug of antirationalism in one way or another. Their mentality can be studied in the hundreds of journals issuing forth in mighty torrents from every conceivable clique and group. And thanks to the wonders of modern technology that have given us the word-processor, the fax, and desktop publishing devices, we can partake in the latest outpourings from breathtaking paradigms, regardless of whether we live in red-hot Ivy League centers or in the bush leagues at the periphery. Reappearing in ever new guises, the cognitive style of the counterculture thus thrives in the academy, appearing in a luxuriant variety of liberationisms, the critical studies of all sorts of topics, of deconstructionisms, postconstructionism, and so forth.

The assault against the basic structures of "bourgeois society" in this manner has been supplemented by attempts to subvert "bourgeois science." In a cacophony of radical epistemologies, highly abstract modes of cognition, under their own steam and as if in an imaginary space, advance themselves. In the absence of rules of empirical verification, they no longer have to be related back to reality in its immediate sense, though those who follow them step by step find them utterly cogent. Although at first blush the currently fashionable paradigms appear to be highly intellectualized and free of ulterior motives, their underlying design becomes readily apparent at closer scrutiny. And as it was with the unambiguous message of the counterculture, so it is with the newly reigning radical epistemologies: come hell or high water, existing structures and cognitive boundaries have to be destroyed wherever they are and whatever they may be.

If the transformation of American academic culture from the 1960s to the present is, to use John Silber's words, "in large part the story of how the humanities were but no longer are the core of college education," then this story surely also includes the transformation of the faculty in the manner just described. This provides us with our third point of departure.

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The transformation of the faculty was greatly facilitated by the shortage of qualified scholars in the wake of the phenomenal expansion of American higher education. The reservoir of committed academics, already small to begin with, was in no way large enough to meet the pressing needs of institutions bursting at the seams. To pick up the slack, the gates had to open to newly and quickly-minted academics. Frequently underprepared, lacking in scholarly predispositions, and highly critical of the traditional nature of scholarship and its purpose, the sixties generation arrived on a campus still reeling under demands for which the academy was not prepared. Like the bewildered student body they were appointed to teach rather than to educate, the new professoriate simply transposed the package of assumptions and habits acquired during their tumultuous youth in the activist years of the sixties onto an academy in limbo. In addition to staying true to their countercultural cognitive style, they were automatically inclined to filter all intellectual questions through the lens of the more or less radical political activism that had become their second nature. Their countercultural predispositions thus received powerful political reinforcements. It did not take long before a whole range of new courses that had made their way into the college curriculum reflected the often noted "cognitive fit" between counterculture and radical politics.

Once on campus, however, an odd thing happened to the new professoriate, now pressing onward to that academic Eden called "tenure." The much-criticized traditional structures of the liberal academy provided them with security without requiring responsibility. These structures anchored the sixties professoriate almost immovably into a privileged class. It found itself in the ambivalent position of a young man living on an allowance from a father whom he hates. If the term "co-optation" applies anywhere, it surely does in this instance. The result was a deep feeling of guilt and resentment, not combined with any genuine desire to escape. But some psychological escape, some form of self-justification there must be, and one of the most readily available could be found in the identification with radical, liberationist, and revolutionary causes. During an earlier period the identification was with the Soviet Union, later with the causes of Mao's China, subsequently to be replaced with more universalistic identifications such as "the causes" of the third world, the poor, peace, the oppressed, women, the environment. In short, there was identification with any cause not related to the preservation of the structures of the traditional liberal university and the capitalist industrial society – the very same structures that provide the basis for intellectuals' livelihood and security. There emerged a new propensity among American intellectuals to turn to the state as the prime purveyor of every need, a propensity that further helped to accentuate

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massive shifts toward a centralization of political power, already well in progress in the society at large. To date, as study after study shows, that propensity remains one of the most distinctive inclinations among the professoriate. The actual facts do not matter, nor does there exist a genuine desire to explore in a careful and systematic manner realistic avenues toward change. Where sentiments and feelings do not have to be tested by empirical reality, utopianism reigns supreme and gives new meaning to the cliché, "this is academic." In view of these incongruities, we may well be allowed to observe that the liberal academy provides the "tenured radicals" with a safe enclave where, in George Orwell's phrase, "the life of a country gentleman and the moral attitudes of a saint can be enjoyed simultaneously."

In the unexamined transposition of modes of perception and interpretation from the arena of politics to that of the academy, the new members of the professoriate violated traditional liberal scholarship's first rule, enjoining scholars to be fiercely independent in all intellectual matters, scrupulously precise and rigorous in their scholarly work, and guided by a mode of reasoning distinct from that in any other sphere of life. The current phrase "the politicization of the academy" is an apt description of what has occurred, and the process itself has by now developed its own dynamics. The assault has been particularly virulent in the humanities and the social sciences, though law, medicine, and the so-called health sciences saw their share of attacks as well. All the knowledge that had accumulated in the humanities through the centuries was relativized and placed into the context of whatever intellectual fad happened to rule the day. Untainted by an understanding of the achievements of the classics, both as icons of permanence and as an index of change, the new professoriate was ready to destroy an inheritance of timeless value. Much of the same happened in the social sciences as well. Here a particular species of social scientist made his or her, as the case may be, entrance, as the "moralist-scientist" who claimed to be the only one who had clear visions of what is right. This new breed proceeded to assemble quantities of information to bolster that vision, conveniently ignoring facts that ran counter to their moral visions. In the cold light of empirical rational analysis, however, the oversights, omissions, and linked analogies typical of studies by moralist-scientists cannot be accidental; rather they must be seen as determined efforts to defend a particular political presupposition and the moral pillars upon which it rests. But those pillars, all too often, are shaky. One has only to read the course descriptions in disciplines such as anthropology, history, political science, psychology, and sociology to become impressed by their degree of politicization in this manner and by their loss of direction and purpose. Most importantly, perhaps, the scientific world view on which

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Western scholarly discourse depends began to be problematized in the manner described. Phenomena were taken apart that could not be taken apart, methodologies dissembled, interpretational grids scrutinized and explained out of existence.

All of these activities added up to the ultimate indictment of the validity of the traditional liberal epistemology. In its place moved emotionally charged and politically informed epistemologies of a great variety, lacking in coherence and often working at cross purposes. The kaleidoscope of competing approaches to matters of the mind and human life in general received an enthralled hearing in the academy quite disproportionate to the intrinsic plausibility of their theoretical potential. These new propositions helped to fundamentally transform the intellectual culture. In a relatively short span of less than thirty years, the university once guided by a liberal ethos of science was turned into a highly politicized enterprise in search of mechanisms for self-destruction. At times, the attacks on a scholarship committed to logic and the scientific method – "bourgeois scholarship" in Marxian terms – were so venomous and frequently irrational as to merit the description of academic witch-hunts. Anyone preparing to defend the "liberal" approach to scholarship and its lasting value was declared to be an obstacle to progress, an enemy of all right-thinking people. In this sense, the attack on "bourgeois scholarship" must be understood as an attack on the values of traditional liberalism and the political-economic achievements it helped to produce.

This is not the place to provide a blow-by-blow description of the assault against the liberal academy. Nor is it the place to dwell on the degree of the intellectual chaos that has been produced. Above all, this is not the place to undertake a blanket indictment of all the new scholarly work that has been produced by the legions of researchers working within the new paradigms. When guided by the rules of the rational-scientific method, the dissembling mode of research has been able to make important and lasting contributions to our stock of knowledge. So, for instance, the new subdisciplines of social demography and social history have been able to add significant new insights and dimensions to old problems. A concern with questions of the third world is not necessarily subversive, as the collections of empirical findings on third world migration, urbanization, poverty, and industrialization, and their analyses in a variety of alternative modes so clearly demonstrate. When analyzed within the framework of the rational-scientific method, these data have served as important correctives to previously held positions. And even the new feminist scholarship, particularly when bound by acceptable rules of analysis, has made important contributions to our knowledge about microprocesses and dynamics at work at the bottom of society. Let there be no mistake then; there is still a lot of research done in the academy to-

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day, some of which is good and occasionally even brilliant. The problem is that we have lost any yardstick for differentiating between what good scholarship is and what scholarship reveals purely political agendas.

It is at this point where my substantial differences with my radical as well as with my conservative friends becomes most clearly evident. As a sociologist of knowledge, I have to agree with the epistemologies that hold all human phenomena to be social constructs. But there is a wide gulf between the sociological proposition that knowledge is culturally based and the claim that all knowledge reflects politics (be this now the politics of class, race, age, or gender). From this view, the currently operative radical epistemologies are but a caricature of complex epistemological questions. Even more problematic is the radical tendency to blur the distinction between the social boundedness of knowledge and the methodologies applied to determine the contours and the degree of these boundaries. I would be the last to insist on the supremacy of any one methodology to knowledge (all methodologies are constructions designed to apprehend reality in some form or another and hence open to testing), and it may well be that we are "speaking in different languages" as Alisdaire MacIntyre keeps reminding us. This, however, does not mean that we cannot learn to use these different languages, translate their claims into each other, and test which is better suited for the best possible understanding of particular problems. Once we admit the validity of this requirement, the old rules of rational analysis that have been the hallmark of the modern Western academy reenter the arena.

I too have drunk from the well of relativity, and I cannot pretend not to have done so. But this does not mean that everything is relative and that there are no timeless values and insights to be gained. However, what differentiates me most fundamentally from the pyrotechnicians of antirational epistemology construction is their faith in the benefits of radical politics. As someone who grew up in the war-torn years of Europe under Nazism and who had ample opportunities to test the blessings of Communism in the harsh realities of everyday life, I have received a lasting inoculation against any form of utopianism and what my academic friends call "sentimental mush." I am equally skeptical of political agendas of radical change that, to paraphrase the Marquis de Sade, promise "one more last effort, citizens, and paradise is yours" – hence my appreciation of the liberal rules of scholarship that require the empirical verifiability of all truth claims. The request to explore whether a proposition can be "falsified" remains, to my mind, one of the cardinal rules of the scholarly enterprise. As a comparative sociologist, I know something about the unrealizability of proposals for "progress," especially those that intend this or that realization of "the new man" under socialism or, for that matter, a "new humanity" in a gender-free future.

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If I now turn to my conservative friends, I seem to be equally at odds with them on a number of fundamental issues. Although I am in general sympathetic to their values to conserve the great achievements of the Western tradition as well as to their principled defense of freedom, the importance of community, voluntary associations, and the role of religion in the life of individuals, my most fundamental disagreement relates to the traditionalists' apodictic certitude about the absolute value of specific philosophical and religious traditions. Friedrich von Hayek, the Nobel laureate economist, gave voice to my own reservations when he observed some years ago that the conservative "feels safe and content only if he is assured that some higher wisdom watches and supervises change, only if he knows that some authority is charged with keeping the change 'orderly'." What is at issue here is the traditionalist's suspicion of modern consciousness, and here specifically the experience of relativity. There can be little argument over the proposition that a crucial element of modern consciousness is a generally pragmatic attitude, a vision of the world as "makable" and, consequently, has a "tinkering" approach to the handling of most if not all problems. The experience of relativity, on the other hand, implies an awareness that all world views and value systems are contingent upon specific historical and social circumstances and that their values need to be empirically verified in an ongoing manner. The first makes me inclined toward an "instrumentalist" approach to issues of individual and social life in the pragmatic mode, an approach that remains the *bête noir* of every dyed-in-the-wool conservative; the second makes me much less certain about the prescriptive power of any particular tradition without subjecting its claims to systematic empirical scrutiny. That is to say, I see history as the successive disclosure, occulation, and rediscovery of moral insights. While I am very certain of some of these insights (such as the infinite value of every individual human being and, therefore, the moral repugnance of acts or institutions that deny this value), I am not in a position to affirm without qualifications any of the specific traditions in which these insights have come down to us. Although such a moral stance allows for strong, even passionate moral judgments, it will not accord ultimate legitimacy to any empirical (and *ipso facto* historical and "socially constructed") institution. On the practical level, the moral stance I cherish is more concerned with consequences than with principles.

Needless to say, this sort of intellectual and moral stance cuts against the absolutism of the left as well as that of the right. Against both it affirms that politics is not intended to save our souls but to accomplish specific, necessarily limited, purposes in the real world in which we live. It is a moral stance that resonates well with the values that inform the classical liberal tradition of the modern university.

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Let me come to a conclusion with a few observations about the persisting viability of this tradition. The modern university, it has often been observed, is the true child of the Enlightenment. At its core stands the rational scientific pursuit of knowledge. Its primary focus is on the cognitive complex which distinguishes sharply between cognitive and moral-evaluative orientations. The value of cognitive rationality, as Talcott Parsons pointed out some time ago, provides the modern university with its autonomy. Without a firm commitment to intellectual practice on the universalistic basis of cognitive rationality, the modern university is bereft of its legitimacy and is unable to maintain its important function. It is for that reason that the university, perhaps more than any other institution of modern society, depends upon a high degree of intellectual freedom and noninterference from the outside. As history shows, this independence was not achieved without considerable effort. Only gradually could the Western university succeed in achieving this goal. Regardless of the inherent limitations to its quest for an autonomous intellectual culture, the ideal is hard to question. To be sure, the university has many other functions as well and is intertwined with society on many levels. Inasmuch as the university is embedded in society, political, economic, and social concerns have always been relevant to its tasks and will remain so. They find their way into the curriculum, and hence courses today, as in the past, range from the pure to the applied, and from the general to the specific. The treatment of a whole spectrum of contemporary concerns – including poverty, inequality, ecology, feminism, racism, and discrimination on the one hand, and those concerning a wide variety of epistemological propositions on the other – are undoubtedly legitimate concerns and cannot be kept from finding a hearing in the university. However, the exploration of any of these subjects must be conducted in rational analytical terms and must stand the muster of empirical reality testing. Not to do so would be a debasement of academic principles, and knowledge would be turned into mere ideology, opinions, and sentiments.

On the other side of the coin, it has to be kept in mind as well that knowledge is not only of practical use. Though important and often of great utility, its instrumental use is only secondary to the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. It is this difference in emphasis that distinguishes the professional schools from the purely academic enterprise. In the same manner as art is not primarily concerned with furthering social interests or sentiments or that religion cannot primarily be an instrument of social cohesion and cannot be used for growth in economic production, so the ethos of science requires that the pursuit of knowledge must remain independent of its practical use. By and large, the modern university has been successful in achieving a fortuitous, albeit a

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precarious, balance between the contradictory demands placed upon it. This balance has made for the remarkable ascent of the Western university and constitutes its great civilatory mission. It would amount to suicide for the modern university not to continue to be guided by this great tradition.

Nathan Glazer: I agree with just about everything that Brigitte Berger says. Yes, there has been a huge growth of higher education, and that itself does raise problems. There are attacks from the right and from the left – the terms encompass a congeries of positions – on what was for at least some years before the disturbances of the later 1960s a rather self-assured and self-confident institution. We do see, perhaps more than we did, an increasing focus on colleges and universities as "providing entry tickets to professions," though in some degree of course they always performed this role. We do see the impact of the "expressive revolution," as Brigitte Berger calls it, in many realms. We see a romance with any tendency critical of "bourgeois society," among many faculty members, and we see an attack on the assumptions of science and scientific work, sometimes criticized as narrowly "Western," or male, or instrumental. I agree with her in her criticism of "the traditionalists' apodictic certitude about the value of specific philosophical and religious traditions." The name of Allan Bloom does not appear, but I imagine Brigitte Berger has him in mind. I appreciate and share particularly her pragmatism – "more concerned with consequences than with principles," and her relative relativism, and her interest in third world questions – though there she seems to limit herself to a comment on the value of empirical studies of third world problems and makes no judgment on the more controversial notion that some wisdom might lie outside that main line of the history of thought that runs from ancient Greece through Europe.

All this suggests that the organizers of this conference might have sought further in finding a discussant of her paper, and that one sociologist is not the best commentator on the paper of another sociologist of similar persuasions, if one expects the fur to fly and light to emerge from heated disagreement. But I have a few points to make on the general theme of the idea of the university, which modify if only partially the weight of some of the points Brigitte Berger has made.

First, what concretely should we have in mind when we speak of the "Idea of the University"? We have 12 million students more or less, and three-quarters of a million faculty, in what we might call institutions of higher education, a term increasingly in ill favor among specialists who study this world. After all, one-third of the students are in community colleges, and most of those will never go further. The term

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most in favor now is "post-secondary" institutions. In our democratic and egalitarian world, it is very hard to make formal distinctions of merit among institutions. Loans and grants from the federal government and most states are available on the same basis, whether one attends an elite liberal arts school, a major research university, a community college, or a profit-making institution that claims to train one in almost any marketable skill.

I give this description of the world of post-secondary education to emphasize one central point; our students are looking for something that gives them an occupation, at which they can make a living. For the great majority, I would say, that is all they are looking for. Not only are one-third of our students in community colleges, but the biggest single major by far among the rest of the undergraduates is business. I don't know what happens in an undergraduate business concentration – I hope it is something like economics, along with some mathematics dealing with finance and the like. Our largest postgraduate programs are education, business, health sciences, medicine, law – none notoriously intellectual occupations concerned with ideas.

Even when one looks at those undergraduates who are not majoring in business, engineering, education, health sciences, and the like, but in the arts and sciences, one of course sees the dominance of practical objectives. Perhaps when one considers such themes as the crisis of the university or conflict over the idea of the university, this dominance of practical and career-oriented studies is beside the point. I do think they enter into the matter, but not in the same way as a conflict of ideas. They raise the question, "What is the weight or significance of the conflict of ideas?" One can argue practical preparation for careers should not be part of the university. But as is well known, our colleges and universities were always more expansive in providing for practically-oriented studies than the universities of Europe. If one wanted to be an engineer, to study music or art, or to go into business, there was no education oriented toward these objectives in the classic British university: indeed, even law and medicine were studied outside the university. And many foreign observers looked askance at American universities and colleges because of the range of professions and occupations for which they trained.

But American colleges and universities are not unique anymore: in country after country we see the upgrading of institutions formerly considered inferior to the university because of their training in practical pursuits, and the erasing of distinctions among them. Perhaps this harms the university by diluting the concentration on study and research for its own sake. Or does it rather in some way raise standards for preparation for elementary and secondary school teaching, or nursing, or optometry,

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when they can be prepared for within universities?

I give this overall picture of higher or post-secondary education in order to raise a central question: How do the kinds of conflicts that engage us at this conference – over the legitimacy of the scientific perspective and objective knowledge, over the challenge to their preeminence by radically new perspectives and a kind of extreme relativism – affect society, or even the university? Where does it actually take place? Certainly not much in the occupational studies of community colleges; or in the sciences in the undergraduate college; or in the professional schools of business, education, medicine, and law, though to some extent it does appear in law schools, as we know from the Critical Legal Studies movement in elite law schools. (But most students in law schools couldn't care less about the critique of Critical Legal Studies, if their main interest is to practice law. It is perhaps only in a few elite law schools where many students think of law as a kind of general passport to a range of possible careers that, I would guess, the debate over CLS plays much role.)

It is in the social sciences and the humanities that we see the battle engaged, but even there, in rather restricted areas. In economics, perhaps the largest of the social sciences, we see less conflict over just what economics is or should be than in previous decades. Institutional economics has I believe quite disappeared, and so has Marxist economics. One central paradigm now prevails, using the same terms, methods and assumptions. The debates, which are fierce, are really over how to weight different key factors (savings or consumption, interest rates or inflation or government debt, and so on), but the debates are fought with weapons from the same armamentarium, and with methods that are common. One economist may prefer more liberty and another more equality, but there will be no difference in the terms they use to make their arguments or the empirical tests they resort to with which to defend them.

Indeed, in almost every field of the social sciences there are large areas relatively untouched by the kind of debate among conservatives, liberals, and radicals that Brigitte Berger emphasizes: does it play much role in voting studies in political science, in public opinion studies in sociology, in demography, in ethnography? Yes, we can find the effort to overthrow paradigms in many places – even, as I have discovered, in geography – but very often one can link this to political or philosophical positions only weakly: remember one way to get ahead in the academy is to say something new, and in the social sciences it doesn't matter too much whether what one says is outlandish or outrageous or even untrue as well as new.

This it strikes me is even truer in some parts of the humanities. Indeed it is in English literature and criticism that we find the most radical

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challenge to the cognitive or rational or scientific principle. We are all acquainted with the kind of things that go on at Yale or at Duke. But I wonder how excited we should get. Perhaps I am being overly pragmatic, but it strikes me that the world will not be changed for good or ill by a new way of reading George Eliot or Herman Melville, or even Shakespeare and Milton. I will probably expose my philistinism when I say that I always wondered as a college student fifty years ago why anyone took the trouble to take courses in the English novel or essay or poetry. Weren't they all in English?

It is true that new sensational ways of understanding the world are also to some extent ensconced in philosophy or in sociology, or in comparative literature and in history, but when I look around I don't see great damage to the university and its essential character from a new relativism based on sex and race and class, asserting a new method and new truths. In a few fields, yes. And even in these fields, much that is traditional and fully in harmony with the university of the pre-sixties will be found. It is also true, as has been pointed out a number of times at this conference, that a new perspective leads one to explore new data in the social sciences and relatively ignored writers in the humanities, and that is not all bad.

But there is indeed a somewhat different threat, which is linked to these new ideas but whose force comes from another source: this is the idea of the university as representative of the racial and ethnic and sexual divisions of society. One can demand jobs for black faculty because they will introduce a new perspective; but one can also demand jobs for black faculty because there are few of them and they have a right to have more. One is an argument in the intellectual realm: there are indeed new perspectives in many fields, and there are various approaches to introducing them into the university. In fact, there is no necessary connection between the idea of new perspectives and the idea of representation. In view of how many non-black scholars, American and foreign, have worked on black culture, black history, black problems, one may well introduce the perspectives and knowledge of these new fields of inquiry without particularly increasing the number of black faculty. (The same story can be told by changing black to Hispanic or Asian or female.)

But there is that second argument, not really an argument over intellectual perspectives, and that is over jobs, and that brings us back to our starting point as to the main function of higher education today. It is a credentialing function, a function of qualifying persons for further education, all in the end leading to a defined occupation. It is a job preparation and sorting function. How to accommodate this pressure is a real problem and one sees no easy way of doing so. It was something of a revelation to me some years ago, when a professor at a Southern uni-

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versity went to jail rather than reveal his vote in a tenure case dealing with a woman. I spoke to a judge in a U.S. Circuit Court (formerly a professor) about the case, who said, of course the professor had no case: under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act the law was fixed that all information bearing on possible discrimination must be revealed. And indeed he did have no case: he stayed in jail. Today a complaint over not getting tenure in a university has the same status as a complaint over not being promoted to assistant floor manager.

We in the universities think we can be exempt from the requirements that now bear heavily on public and private employers, requirements that defend the rights of applicants and employees from discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity and national origin and sex and handicap and age, and involve some claim to proportional representation, and perhaps for a time we can in practice get that exemption. But I don't think we will have it for long.

As we know there are terrible conflicts going on now in India over the extension of "reservations," quotas for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, which are now being extended to "other backward castes," one-half the population. There are large parts of India in which persons of upper castes, regardless of how qualified, cannot enter a medical school or an engineering school. An Indian Supreme Court Justice, ruling in a case dealing with the promotion of clerks, and dismissing the case of those who had appealed that their rights were ignored by the quota for promotions for scheduled caste clerks, wrote: "After all, here is a pen-pushing clerk, not a magistrate, accounts officer, forest officer, sub-registrar, a space scientist or top administrator or one on whose initiative the wheels of a department speed up or slow down . . . we are dealing with clerical posts in the Registration Department where alert quill driving and a smattering of special knowledge will make for a smoother turnout of duties." Well, that is an Indian Supreme Court Justice speaking, in a country where hierarchy plays a rather larger role than ours. Can one imagine a Supreme Court Justice in this country, even Justice Scalia, speaking the same way? No, he will write that the rules that apply to whether a clerk can get a job will apply as to whether a scientist or scholar can get a job. He will have to judge the case under the laws governing employment, including Title VII, not under any rules governing scholarship and science. And the same will hold true for admission to educational programs, for that determines what kind of jobs people will get.

I don't know how to separate the job preparation side of the university from the university as an institution devoted to learning for its own sake. After all, the student who sits before us is probably more conerned about the former than the latter, perhaps may not be

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concerned about the latter at all. The general patterns of development of the American college and university don't easily permit such a separation. There are some elite institutions clearly devoted only to research and scholarship, such as the Institute for Advanced Study, but how many of us would be happy with a solution that bans any student who thinks of his college education as a means to earning a living? As long as the university is so closely involved with preparing people for jobs and careers, and they expect that it will do that, it will be subject to the expectations and laws that govern the ways we prepare for and get jobs and progress within our careers. The expectations and practices and laws that govern the getting and giving of jobs are having today and will have on the future as great an impact on the university as any ideas stemming from Marxism or structuralism or deconstruction or any of the new perspectives on research arising from the new concern for race and sex.

Catharine Stimpson: As I look out at you I want to assure you that I do know it's lunchtime, and that if you listen to me through your lunchtime I thank you for your repression of a perfectly healthy appetite. My comments will overlap a little with Nathan Glazer's; the areas we do not agree on might come up in the question period.

During World War Two, Wallace Stevens composed one of his major poems, an epic of irony and intelligence, "Esthétique du Mal." An early section interrogates the tensions between the mind and the world and cautions against the arrogance of reason. "The mind, which is our being," the speaker says, but then he abruptly swerves to qualify himself:

> . . . wrong and wrong,
> The genius of the body, which is our world,
> Spent in the false engagements of the mind.

Today I am to comment on Professor Brigitte Berger's paper, "The Enemies of Rationality." I praise its ambition, mindfulness, and search for an overarching principle to guide the university. I also rue some wrongs, which flare up most vividly when the paper seems to misconstrue the body of history and contemporary realities. Because I have only a little time, both words of praise and of rue will be too blunt and terse. To my regret, I will also be unable to touch on two issues. One, affirmative action, concerns institutional governance. The other, the canon, concerns aesthetic and curricular judgments.

Boldly, spaciously, Professor Berger is making three major statements. First, Professor Berger has an idea of the university that is proudly indebted to the Enlightenment. The university has a dignified role: to serve as a center of "cognitive/rational" inquiry, of free and self-scruti-

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nizing thought. Such a site is particularly crucial because neither mystical revelation nor the book of nature provides our diet of daily truths. Instead, we create them in the kitchens of history. In brief, knowledge is socially constructed. The university needs hard, clear thought in order to analyze this architecture and society itself.

Clearly, people of good will can fuss a little with such claims. I, for example, disagree with the sentence, ". . . there is a wide gulf between the sociological proposition that knowledge is socially based and the claim that all knowledge reflects politics (be this the politics of class, race, age, or gender)." The proposition and the claim do dovetail – in this way. The social relations of class, race, age, or gender are, in part, political relations. That is, they involve questions of power, authority, and, too often, force. If, then, knowledge is socially based, knowledge – what is known, who knows it, to what end – must be politically based as well. I am also more cheerful than Professor Berger is about the various epistemological quarrels that rage today in such fields as philosophy, literary theory, cognitive studies, the neurosciences, women's studies, and cultural studies. I wish they were more pervasive, for the university without epistemological quarrels is like a gubernatorial race without candidates. I am less sanguine than Professor Berger is about the capacities and influence of that tragicomical historical character, "the cogito." Psychoanalysis has shown us how precariously consciousness hovers over the unconscious. Moreover, "the cogito" has had its false and pernicious engagements with the world. Finally, under the pressures of science, our sense of the distinctiveness of the human mind is breaking down. What is the relationship of human intelligence to "artificial intelligence"? Of a chess player to Deep Think? Similarly, our sense of the distinctiveness of the human body is breaking down. A recent front-page story in *The New York Times* told of experiments in which scientists have bred laboratory mice with "tiny samples of human organs growing in them." What is the relationship of the human body to the animal body if a little mouse can nurture human lungs, intestines, pancreases, thymuses, and livers? Because the old borders of human consciousness and the human body are collapsing, I am not willing to parody poststructuralism and its interrogation of conventional concepts of the *cogito*.

Nevertheless, I share Professor Berger's passionate commitments to the principle of freedom of inquiry and to the idea of the university as a social space, a location in our cultural topography, in which we must think things through. Here we speak carefully, scrupulously, and generously. Here we seek a talking cure for our own warps and prejudices. We subject our subject positions to analysis. Here, if we speak different languages, we learn to translate them for each other. Here we teach fairly and coherently. Indeed, the humanities and social sciences today

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need general narratives that will integrate more traditional narratives with the insights of the new scholarship about everyday life, race, ethnicity, labor, and gender – without masking historical conflicts among them. Obviously, respecting all these exacting obligations will necessarily lead to critical thinking – about everything, including "Western values" and "classical liberalism."

Second, Professor Berger is outlining a historical narrative about higher education, especially in the United States since 1950. According to this story, before 1950 institutions were cast in "the traditional liberal mold." After 1950, they underwent several lamentable changes. Rapidly expanding, they began to service a large public, not an elite. Unfortunately, this part of the story ignores, *inter alia*, the expansive force of the G. I. Bill of Rights, passed in 1944. Becoming more corporate, universities became daring but rapacious "research machines." Unfortunately, this part of the story ignores the relationships among university research, federal funding, and the national security concerns of the capitalist industrialist state Professor Berger prefers. Grinding on, such machines intensified the tension between graduate and undergraduate education. This part of the story is valid, but unfortunately, it may inflate tension into a terminal illness. The ten institutions that now spend the most on research and development in science and engineering still seem to have some appeal to undergraduates. (These institutions are Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, Cornell University, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, Texas A & M University, and the University of California at San Diego.) Not surprisingly then, according to Professor Berger's narrative, higher education became vulnerable to a "massive assault" on its commitment to "rationality, freedom, and empiricism" from politicizers on the left, now much-maligned as "tenured radicals," and from a "motley variety" of conservatives.

I fear that the polemical zeal of this narrative often washes over its good sense. Inexorably, the paper deploys a hyperbolic language of crisis. I think, for example, of its metaphors of disease. Of course, American institutions have done foolish and destructive things. Of course, American academics have said foolish and destructive things. I wish women's studies in the 1970s had been more suspicious of the totalizing theory of women as victim. Nevertheless, universities in other countries – Beijing University since June of 1989; Latin American universities under military dictatorships – surely provide far more compelling examples of institutions of learning in crisis.

Moreover, the United States now has 3,504 institutions of higher education. In the fall of 1987, they served 7,231,506 full-time students; 5,536,801 part-time students. In 1987-88, these institutions awarded 993,

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362 bachelor's degrees; 298,733 master's degrees; 34,839 doctoral degrees. In brief, higher education is big enough to be impure, messy enough to defy generalizations, and sprawling enough to demand not a single monolithic "idea of the university" but rather "ideas of the university" to organize itself.

Unfortunately, Professor Berger's paper, although admittedly a series of "points of departure for future discussions" about such an idea, does tend to abandon the rigor of empirical inquiry for the vigor of generalization, even as it praises empiricism. In doing so, it makes several elisions. First, it elides a number of academic disciplines, each with its own criteria for intellectual plausibility. We judge thinking about the poetry of Wallace Stevens differently from our thinking about actuarial tables. The paper fuses together various kinds of institutions, each with its own structure and mission, each with its own registers of change. So melded are public and private institutions, secular and religious institutions, research universities, comprehensive universities, state colleges, liberal arts colleges, service academies, and community colleges, another creation inseparable from the post-World War Two expansion of higher

Next, the paper explicitly ignores the differences among people in higher education that race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and many other realities create. Implicitly, of course, the paper recognizes these differences by calling ardently for cognitive rationality as a unifying value for the university and "multiversity," Clark Kerr's term for the complex contemporary university that we have scorned too much. However, it is dangerous to ignore our diversities, the differences among us, so explicitly. I am not calling for a reduction of politics to identity politics, for a conflation of human identity with membership in a single group, for a fragmentation of the university community into a cluster of mutually disrespectful little groups. I am not bringing matches for a bonfire of the white male vanities of Plato, Aristotle, and Shakespeare.

I am, however, asking higher education to design curricula that respectfully show why we are different and why were are diverse. These curricula would provide academic material for a university community that would balance a sense of common purpose with separate spaces for different groups if they so desire it. This common purpose would be two-fold: a shared commitment to cognitive rationality; a shared commitment to a just and secure community. Intellectually and socially, I obviously support multiculturalism. I regret the willfully ignorant accusations against multiculturalism I hear and read today. They are at best provincial, at worst a cruel violation of an important value: to know whereof one speaks. Multiculturalism is not a narcissistic retreat with one's ethnic or racial peers from the demands of the classroom or the polis. Multiculturalism is the recognition that we live, nationally and in-

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ternationally, with many cultures, defined both anthropologically and aesthetically. Each has meaning to its inhabitants. These cultures interact, intersect, collide, influence each other. Our task is to understand these zones of interaction and to articulate national and international unities. In the United States, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights provide a national unity. In so doing, we will be pluralistic, but we will be fearful of a pluralism that declares, "I am a pluralist but have the omniscience to judge all others."

Finally, Professor Berger's paper compresses all contemporary faculty into one figure, who has frolicked at Woodstock and sat at the feet of Jacques Derrida. "There are virtually no intellectuals in the academy today," her paper states, "who are not in the heart of their hearts antistructuralist and infected by the bug of antirationalism in one way or another." This compression is a symptom of a faulty but well-publicized mode of thinking about higher education that Professor Berger endorses: demonizing the 1960s as the playground of the Children of Caliban, a gesture that has some post-World War Two roots in the labeling of 1950s bohemians as the enemies of civilization. Not only did Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, and Isabel Sawhill earn their doctorates in the 1960s, but also the intellectual and scholarly reforms that emerged from this period did correct genuine errors. The curricula of the 1950s were hardly exemplars of one feature of Newman's School of Universal Learning in *The Idea of a University* (1873), that is, a place ". . . whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge." Reforms after the 1960s also produced serious, valuable work, a point Professor Berger makes. Of course, this work has historical connections to political and social movements. The existence of such connections neither makes this work unique in intellectual history, nor hopelessly mires it in bias, nor transmogrifies a footnote into a political platform. Would any reasonable person wish that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. had not done his archival work on nineteenth-century African-American literature, or that Claudia Koonz had not written her history of women in the Nazi Party, or that Cynthia Epstein had not studied women in the legal profession?

Simultaneously and not surprisingly, the historical narrative of "The Enemies of Rationality" idealizes and decontextualizes the "traditional liberal mold" of higher education. Traditionally, as we all know, the university has given the state, its requirements, and its professions some service. As Alfred North Whitehead remarked in *The Aims of Education* (1929), in his defense of business schools, the University of Salerno was devoted to the study of medicine. More specifically, two nineteenth-century developments in the United States that shaped twentieth-century higher education rough up any easy belief in liberalism's universally

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benevolent reign. They remind us of issues over which the liberal arts stumbled. Variations of these issues are with us still today. The first development was the passage of three pieces of legislation – the first Morrill Act, the Hatch Act, and the Second Morrill Act. They reflected a sharp and legitimate discontent with the inability of the liberal arts to adapt to changing social and economic conditions. The second development was the creation of separate systems of higher education for women and African-Americans because powerful ideological and institutional forces were excluding women and African-Americans from their enclaves. Indeed, a purpose of the Second Morrill Act was to support what we now refer to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Third, Professor Berger eloquently asks us to abandon tired ground, to stop constructing the contest over higher education as a struggle between left and right. History has battered these terms. I would like to join her on some new ground that preserves our admirable traditions. However, she asks us to choose one pole in another binary opposition, that between rationality, a good, and antirationality, a collection of dangers. Before making such a choice, however, we might reread Wallace Stevens. His poetry dramatizes a constant movement between these poles, an intellectual and aesthetic and emotional dialectic between them. We choose not one but both – in turn. To complicate matters, Stevens's shifts in perspective, his famous thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird, like the general play of his rhetoric, then warns against dividing the world into two poles with strictly maintained borders. In brief, poetry has a syllabus for a seminar on the idea of the university as the site of cognitive rational activity. I praise poetry's gorgeous utility.

William Phillips: Would you like to respond, Brigitte?

Brigitte Berger: I wouldn't even know how and where to start with my response to Professor Stimpson's lengthy remarks. Basically, Professor Stimpson has been trying to devalue if not everything, then at least most of what I have been trying to argue. Her position, to my mind, reflects in singular manner the particular cognitive style which is, as I have been trying to argue in my essay, so highly problematic for the future of the Western university. It is the cognitive style of that cohort of "tenured radicals" that is pronouncedly hostile to the primacy of the type of cognitive rationality that has been distinctive of Western academic thought and that has been largely responsible for the university's spectacular success. The cognitive style Professor Stimpson represents assumes its distinctive particularistic epistemology to be universally binding. At closer look, however, it adds up to little more than the class-specific epistemology of upper-middle-class white feminists which has been ensconced in the

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academy during the past decades. So for instance, Professor Stimpson calls for "multiculturalism" in the academic curriculum. As such, this is a legitimate request. But if we inquire into the multiculturalism she has in mind, it becomes evident that it represents little more than the political agenda of the class and gender who formulate their vague sentiments and visions in the familiar soft-left mode. This type of multiculturalism knows little about the realities of other cultures, be they now in the third world or elsewhere. Beyond that it reveals an astounding naivete and ignorance of the realities of the life of the downtrodden and disempowered whom Professor Stimpson claims to champion. The poor of the third world – and in particular the women who figure so prominently in her arguments – will have a hard time to find themselves, their concerns, and their interests reflected in the visions conjured up by Professor Stimpson. The ordinary women of the third world, and for that matter, anywhere else, are hardly interested in the kind of world to be constructed by the pyrotechnics of Professor Stimpson's nimble mind. The poor of the third world, and in particular its women, have rather concrete needs and desires; they passionately are eager to get "a piece of the pie" of what the West has produced in such abundance. Contrary to the expectations of revolutionary Western feminists, they are conservative, if not outright reactionary, in their values and hopes. Hardly interested in the liberation prescriptions of Western feminists, they are deeply involved with the welfare of their families rather than themselves,with their children and, yes, dare one mention it in this company, even with that of their husbands as well.

Professor Stimpson's second objection to my paper revolves around what she calls my "demonization" of the counterculture of the sixties. Her objections to my rather tepid arguments are again predictably couched in the left-liberal mode she represents so singularly well. Admittedly, my paper reveals a skeptical view of the achievements of that movement. It is a view that is informed by a Weberian approach to the analysis of social life which sees modernity as a product of the interplay between forces of rationality and efforts to counter its progress. This is hardly the place to talk about modernization and its monumental achievements and shortcomings. What needs to be emphasized within the context of the paper at issue here, however, is that the Western university, itself perhaps the proudest achievement of the triumph of cognitive rationality, remains inextricably linked to analytical approaches informed by cognitive-rational mindsets. The "iron cage" of modernity, to use Weber's powerful image, with its premium on that cognitive rationality, is part and parcel of the modern world we have created in the university as well as outside of it, and whether we like it or not, short of calamities of unimaginable proportions, there is precious little chance of escaping

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from it, even if we should desire to do so. If our academies are, however, bent on foisting antirational cognitive styles and values upon unsuspecting students, then I would argue that American universities – and by extension American society itself – are in deep trouble indeed. These countermodern mentalities and styles of thought are likely to lead to the kind of decline of American society its critics have predicted for some time. It is for reasons like these that I insist upon the singular importance of cognitive rationality in the academy. In theory, I am open to any intellectual propositions, and be it yet the most outlandish, as long as it is subjected to rational analysis and stands the test of empirical verification. Perhaps in literature, different dynamics are at work – as Professor Stimpson argues. That is all fine and well, as long as it is understood that what we are dealing with is an imaginary world which has little to do with modern reality.

As to Professor Glazer's remarks, permit me only to say that I am grateful for his generosity and kindness, though I do take exception to his argument that things are not as bad as I have made them out to be. I agree with him that it may well be that the university as an institution will continue to totter on, if only for the reason that there are no other institutions available that can keep our youngsters off the street. But if that is all we in the academy are going to do, then I think we have abdicated our important educational and, I would argue, also civilatory mission. Professor Glazer suggests that some academic disciplines have not been infected by the antirationalist bug, and he refers to modern economics in particular. And again, at first sight, this seems to be obviously the case. But from my point of view, modern economics is to be faulted as well, the problem lying at the opposite end of the pole. Modern economics has little to do with the classical mode of rational analysis. It has become frozen in very abstract model-building which has little to do with empirical reality. Investing ingenuity, energy, and efforts into building econometric models of ever higher abstraction and sophistication, modern economics has been turned into an increasingly irrelevant field of inquiry.

Catharine Stimpson: Professor Berger, I took your paper very seriously. I'm sorry that I did not speak loudly enough about post-secondary education as the site of free and rational inquiry. I tried to make that very clear. But I also tried to mention those historical instances when the liberal idea failed. It failed in the nineteenth century, when there were clearly two of them: one was women as rational creatures, and the other was African-Americans as rational and educable creatures. I am always bemused to find myself accused of radicalism. But I do want to say that I'm sorry you thought I was indifferent to poor women and was an ar-

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rogant member of the new class, because I think that women's studies has done as much as any intellectual enterprise of the last twenty years to ask post-secondary education - in its research, in its teaching, and in its institutional practices - to admit people of all classes and both genders. And I hope you would agree with me on that.

Brigitte Berger: I would not agree with that. What you're supposing is that all women think in the same mode in which you think. For many women, post-secondary education is totally unimportant.

William Phillips: Let's open the discussion to the floor now.

Elizabeth Dalton: I'm from Barnard College, and I wanted to ask Professor Berger if she thought the women's movement was useless. I was somewhat surprised by her saying that some of the concerns of the movements of the sixties were totally inimical to the interests of very poor women. I wondered if you could elaborate on that a bit further.

Brigitte Berger: I do not wish to turn this discussion into a debate over the "women's question." Let me simply say here, I have little interest in the achievements of the women's movement, whatever they may be, although I am greatly concerned with the lives of women. My understanding of the last twenty-five years or so has led me to conclude that the modern feminist movement of highly-educated upper-middle-class women has not served the interests of women well. One only has to look at the membership of the various feminist groups to see that it is not a general women's movement. Facts like this, whether one cares to admit it or not, make it evident that women are not a homogeneous group and that the feminist movement is merely a movement of one particular group, infinitesimally small though extremely powerful. There always coexisted a great variety of visions and agendas among women, and this is still the case today. This pluralism of understandings is part of the tapestry that has been so characteristic of American social life for so long. When one goes into the ethnic neighborhoods of Brooklyn or Boston and talks to people sitting on the stoops of their brownstones and in the markets doing their shopping, one becomes impressed with the multiplicity of interests and hopes that move the lives of quite ordinary people. But what all have in common – particularly in the working classes and among the poor – is a concern with the well-being and progress of their children and their families in general. Most of these concerns and visions have little to do with what moves contemporary feminists. Hard personal experiences have taught me to never superimpose my own notions and visions upon others. Let me simply say here once

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more, what all of this comes down to is that women are not the monolithic group feminists wish to make them out to be.

Jean Elshtain: As we all know, the modern university is a very porous institution; that is to say, it's open to all sorts of currents and pressures from the outside. So, on the one hand, we have an image of independence drawn from that medieval corporatist model when the university was chartered and had its own rules, and the king and others couldn't meddle. On the other hand, the university is terribly dependent on all sorts of forces: among others, tuition-driven budgets, corporate and government sponsorship of research that leads to some very murky situations - should universities permit classified research, what about copyrights and patents? At my own institution people are now talking about rules governing "intellectual property" rights. If to that we add a pervasive but very insecure careerism on the part of students who don't know what kind of world they're going to find out there, I'm wondering if the university's institutional integrity may not be in at least as much danger from the invasion by a corporate occupational model and by market images. This includes the dominant vision of the human person as self-interested in a very narrow sense - "homo economicus." I wonder if anyone would care to respond about these currents and pressures that are very much at work upon higher education.

Brigitte Berger: Jean Elshtain has put her finger on something very important: do we now have a new species of man/woman emerging – *homo economicus* – narcissistic and driven by self-interest? I have problems with that. All people are *homo economicus* at all times in history. All people consume, regardless of the level of consumption. Middle-class intellectuals consume literature and poetry and travel; the working-class male (much despised these days) now consumes gadgets and tinkers with all kinds of objects that can be bought. So I do not like the new notion that American are more materialistic than anyone else. I have found the most materialistic people to be in the socialist countries. In the absence of goods, the hunger for goods is more pronounced than here. In fact, among my American students and colleagues, I find a high degree of altruism, of voluntarism, of trying to be helpful to a degree that may be against their own self-interests. As to careerism – I don't think it's quite that, I think it's credentialism that is at issue here. I think there are differences between the two, because you have to have some credentials to give you entrance into the world of work. While I don't see credentialism flourishing among my students, I do not see, unfortunately, that much concern with careerism.

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Nathan Glazer: I've struggled with the subject Jean Elshtain raises, and I really don't know where to come out. I understand the legitimacy of what students are after. They need a degree, a job, a recommendation. Those are absolutely legitimate desires and objectives, and I don't know (and here is my own failing) what role to give them in the university, unless one is in a philosophy department. I also don't know how these issues connect with that other world. My great complaint against Allan Bloom's book is that he didn't explain how Nietzsche and Heidegger have destroyed America. I say that in all seriousness. They may well have, but I couldn't see the connection, and I would love to spend my life studying it. So, in a way, there are two worlds. When I have seen one pure world, I have known that it was based on privilege. When I was visiting at All Souls College it was wonderful to see three distinguished professors give the biggest seminar at Oxford, on inequality. But something was wrong, in that it was only where there was the greatest privilege that I found the greatest freedom to study ideas. I don't know the answer to that problem.

Catharine Stimpson: Jean, I think you point to a larger problem: the increased dependence on private money both in private and public education is a symptom of a larger problem, which is the financing of higher education. A start-up package for an assistant professor in the sciences is about $100,000 -$150,000. It's no surprise that in a survey of college presidents this fall, the majority of them said financing was their greatest problem. It's going to take one billion dollars just to meet the maintenance backlog of engineering schools. So the search for corporate funding is part of a larger fiscal distress.

Ronald Radosh: I thought Professor Berger's presentation was absolutely brilliant, and I'm in general agreement with her positions and analysis. But I want to add something. I think one of the problems with *Partisan Review*, from my own personal standpoint, is that it has too many literary intellectuals. As Nat Glazer said, not enough other disciplines are represented. I am, unfortunately or fortunately, more familiar with what's going on in the historical profession. I also wish that someone had thought of inviting Eugene Genovese to this panel. And I want to recall something he wrote in 1971 about attacking what he called the "nihilist perversions" of the new left (making points much like Professor Berger just made today). "Any good history" - including Marxist history – Genovese wrote, has to rest on "a defense of the admirable and the solid in the experience of our nation and of Western civilization." He went on to say that if you believed in a rationalist and critical tradition - which he argued the new left and the counterculture were not

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– one had to defend the autonomy, the legitimacy, and the integrity of the American university. He then went on to argue that the university was the single institution that most allowed left-wing Marxists and all varieties of left-wing intellectuals to work openly and without opposition. Now, unfortunately, most of the people who listened to Genovese took him at his word and went into the university and stopped colonizing in the factories, which somehow was less fun. But unfortunately they did not go on to defend within the university the critical and rationalist tradition that he was defending. And particularly in history, Genovese has argued (read his piece in *Commentary*, or his very penetrating review of a recent book on Christianity and the black experience), one of the things that has come out of the left in the academy is a horrendous new McCarthyism in which the left is continuing the tradition of the McCarthyism of the old right of the 1950s; it is introducing a new orthodoxy and a new Marxism that attacks anyone trying to work outside of that framework. Most of the historians who were on the new left went into the new social history. Peter Novick, in his very interesting book on objectivity and the historical profession, wrote that thoroughly conservative social historians are about as numerous as Republican folksingers. The fact is that in the new social history, the emphasis has been on denigrating political history, narrative history, the context of historical development, and concentrates exclusively on internal developments of either different elements of the working class, women in the nineteenth century, or women in the twentieth century, or blacks in certain periods. The underlying assumption of the people who do that work, even though they do not always say it openly, is that they have to concentrate on the everyday life of different peoples (and I do agree that within the context some of them have made valuable contributions). But the underlying assumption is that this is a preparation for developing the consciousness needed to reach socialism. They are in history because of a political goal they assumed at the start, and this is the way of realizing it. Many of them made that point openly at the memorial service for Herbert Gutman. It is a political goal, and as Genovese said, almost any book, no matter how tendentious the scholarship, that praises the oppressed or blacks or women can get published and praised, regardless of its real merit. This is a new orthodoxy that I find very dangerous. You also see it in European social history, in the debate on the Russian Revolution. Richard Pipes's book, *The Russian Revolution*, has just come out, and it is going to be published in the Soviet Union, and Robert Conquest's book, *The Great Terror*, is being heralded and printed in the pages of *Pravda*. But in the United States, the leftist social historians who went into Russian history have devoted themselves to showing the authentic, working-class nature of the

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Bolshevik Revolution and pointing out the support the Bolsheviks had. The orthodoxy in this country has been a new McCarthyism; it's extremely dangerous.

I have read a lot of the work on women's history that Catharine Stimpson referred to. There are scores of others you could have mentioned: Linda Gordon on birth control, Marion Kaplan on German Jewish women. These works are admirable. They proceed according to the canons of scholarship and provide valuable information. I don't think anybody would challenge that. There has been a denigration and ignorance of women, and a lot of this has been neglected. But in the profession, particularly in American history, this is the new establishment, the new orthodoxy. And these people are leading an assault on what I'm calling traditionalist mainstream historians outside of the profession, and they are practically blackballing anyone who does any other kind of work.

Brigitte Berger: One simple comment may be permitted: I too would argue that the research flowing from the new social history is of considerable importance. In contrast to some of my conservative friends who are fundamentally suspicious of the new social history, I for one laud it. I do think Genovese's work provides us with one of the best examples I know of that attest to the possibility of combining responsibly the new historical perspective with a classical rational mode of analysis. When one reads Genovese, as for instance in his book *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, the first two chapters proclaim his allegiance to Marxist analysis. But then he proceeds in the rest of the book to totally disregard his Marxist perspective, and the historian committed to rational modes of analysis takes over: What did move the slaves? Religion. How did they survive? Through the networks of interaction they fashioned and strengthened by a faith in God. Genovese, to my mind, is an excellent historian bound by the classical tradition I seek to advocate. What does it matter that he classifies himself (at least at that period in time) as a Marxist? I could not care less about the label any scholar prefers for himself, as long as he remains faithful to the rational mode of analysis.

Leonard Bushkoff: Ron Radosh goes too far. When I was in graduate school I studied nothing but political and diplomatic history. That was what there was, and that was what we did. And in a sense we learned to think of the state system (and war, too) as extremely normal. Social history to me, when it started, was wonderful. I didn't know that there were people, just Bismarck and Metternich. My God, there were ordinary folk down there! Even in military history, you find social history. And it ain't Marxist. It's concerned with ordinary soldiers, ordinary

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people doing their fighting. So this notion that all the social historians are pernicious, are trying to set us up for the next round of the 1960s is nuts. But in line with history, there's something called Vietnam. People here talk about the 1960s, or the infusion of radicalism into the universities, but the Vietnam War was going on then, and if anything delegitimized the old university system, it was the fact that the George Bundys were part of the Vietnam War. And I think that when Robert Alter mentioned this morning the migration into the universities in the late sixties of radicals, or when Hilton Kramer mentioned it yesterday, you left out that there was a war on, a terrible crisis - the worst we'd ever had since the Civil War - and it made the university system and in fact a great deal of American life look bloody awful. And that's what fostered radicalism as much as anything else.

Mary Gordon: I'd like to speak to two points, and they are linked. I think Professor Berger has a very bizarre historical sense of the women's movement: perhaps the most important issue for poor women right now is day care.

Brigitte Berger: Are you sure about that?

Mary Gordon: As sure as I can be about anything.

Brigitte Berger: They want to be with their children.

Mary Gordon: Well, they can't afford to be with their children right now. So the issue of employment for women, which includes giving them the skills they need to be employed and places for their children, is good day care in the here and now, not on some fantasy cloud Cuckoo Land where Mom and the kids can be home. This is one of the most important political issues adopted by both parties, and it has its genesis in the women's movement.

Secondly, you never examined what you mean by the rational. I heard nothing in what you said that would define or elucidate what you meant by the rational, and therefore I found your analysis wanting. In the era that you laud as the "golden age of the university," many irrational practices were tolerated which the sixties undid: quotas for Jews, quotas for blacks, segregated dormitories - all of that does not exist anymore because the "Children of Caliban" described some evils which were silenced, tolerated and valorized in the "golden age" of the post-Enlightenment liberal-thought curriculum that you seem to, I think rather uncritically, extol.

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Brigitte Berger: I don't know how to respond honestly to this question. I happen to know a little about the day care issue, though I cannot claim to be a specialist. I, too, wish that there were some ways for helping poor women and their children. But it can be provided in a variety of ways, and it does not necessarily follow that what may be good for women is also good for their children. The best way of helping does not in all cases involve reliance upon the federal government for initiating, organizing, maintaining, and of course, also financing day care centers. It may well be that both mothers and children could be helped best by providing them with choices, whereby mothers could stay home and care for their children themselves, through vouchers, tax credit mechanisms, and so forth. To put it bluntly, the issue to me is whether women want to put their children into rather badly-managed day care arrangements, or whether they prefer to care themselves for them in their early years of life. Moreover, I think it is important to understand that most working-class women rarely get the same thrill out of work as professors in the academy supposedly do. For a woman to give up her children to whatever arrangement may exist, only to work, let's say, for eight hours a day as a supermarket cashier, may not be precisely a desirable or optimal thing to do. Many of the women I know would prefer to stay home during their children's crucial early years, make a home for them and their husbands. But let me stop here; all I would wish to advocate is to provide people, and that includes women in this instance, with choices, rather than pushing everyone into the same direction.

Now to the next part of the question. Have the "Children of Caliban" really opened up new options, as Professor Gordon likes to think? I am in broad agreement with the economist Barbara Bergman who has shown that according to the employment trajectories of the past hundred years, women have been integrated into the labor market step by step, in accordance with the expansion of the economy. This has had, to my mind, little to do with the women's movement of the past or, for that matter, of today. When all is said and done, we first have to have a flourishing economy to provide women with opportunities to enter the labor market as well as with choices for staying at home or working outside the home; that includes the opportunity to become a feminist in the academy. In other words, Marx was right with his argument that there must a "real basis" in place first before ideas can be institutionalized.

Why do I see social life so very differently when compared with feminist critics today? This question deserves to be looked at. I think that the reasons responsible for my very different views must be found in the fact that in contrast to my critics who are motivated by a single issue,

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that of modern feminism, I take a broader view. My scholarly interests are in the forces that make for change, including the role of ideas and values. In particular, I am interested in change at the bottom of society rather than at the top. Rather than being concerned with the visions of highly-educated upper-middle-class academics, I am interested in the way ordinary people organize their lives, in their norms and hopes. Once one has such a broader lens through which one observes and analyses social life, very different interpretational schemes emerge. Instead of extrapolating only one dimension from the multitude of factors that make up social life, I see the interrelationships among many.

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The Remaking of the Canon

Edith Kurzweil: First of all, I want to introduce our speaker, Cleanth Brooks. As you know, he is one of the central figures among the New Critics. He has written a number of books on William Faulkner, and he has a new book that is going to be published soon. Next to him is Gertrude Himmelfarb, Professor Emeritus of History at the City University of New York. Her latest book is *The New History and the Old*. Next to her is Wilson Moses, Professor of History and English and Director of Afro-American Studies at Boston University. Among his books is a biography of Alexander Crummell. Next to him is Lionel Abel, a contributing editor of *Partisan Review*. His latest book is *The Intellectual Follies*.

Cleanth Brooks: My topic as set forth in the program is "The Remaking of the Canon." But let me say at once that I shall have no list of possible titles to report. For important as may be the particular texts that we choose for reading and teaching, the principles that determine their selection are quite as important. I shall begin, however, on a more personal note – my first encounter with the old-fashioned canon, long, long ago. I did not then know – I was just five years old – that I was encountering the canon. We had no such elegant term for it in those days. I'm sorry that we ever accepted the present term, with its suggestions of an authoritative adoption made somewhere and the stamp of official significance. The term *canon* actually distorts and artificializes something that grew up much more naturally over the centuries – something that has always been rather loose and vague in its composition and not the result of any formal process of "canonization."

My acquaintance with what we now know as the canon began as I have said at the age of five when I came to possess my first book. It presented a very simple reading of the story told in Homer's *Iliad*. I was scarcely up to reading it, but my father read to me from it and would elaborate and explain customs and actions that I could not understand. I repeat that I didn't know that I was encountering any canon. I was told simply that the *Iliad* was a very old and famous story of something that had happened many centuries ago, a story that people thought was memorable and worth preserving. Later on I skipped the eighth grade of grammar school and was sent to a small boarding school that can be best described as a "classical academy." The school was located in a little town in West Tennessee. It existed for some seventy-five years before it finally closed its doors during the 1930s.

The curriculum contained no elective courses. Instead we studied

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history, English, mathematics, Latin, and Greek. But our study was detailed and exact. The students were boys (plus a few girls) from the small towns of West Tennessee and North Mississippi. We had little idea how old-fashioned our course of study was. For example, we had no laboratory sciences, no modern languages, and took no courses in typing, civics, or personal hygiene. I must not imply, however, that we were a band of little pedants. Our little really joyful exercises were football, basketball, and baseball. Our athletic material was light and thin, but we had a fine set of coaches and won most of our games. We had two debating societies that met once every week, and every student had to belong to one or the other. Every student debated, and chosen representatives of the two societies debated each other as the climax of the year. We read such books as Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*, Cicero's *Orations*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and the first three books of Homer's *Iliad*. How wonderfully old-fashioned we were!

If, as some of our more advanced literary critics now claim, a canon of texts is chosen by our political masters as a device for ensuring that the young maintain our master's political control, I have difficulty in seeing how my school's curriculum could have done our country much good. While I was in prep school, the benevolent Warren G. Harding and the concise Calvin Coolidge were our presidents. Reading Ovid and Virgil or Homer seemed to have little bearing on the value of their political leadership – or that of anyone else. Nor, I may add, were solid geometry and trigonometry of much help in confirming their power.

In my college years, little or nothing was done with this preparation that my prep school had given me. I promptly dropped my study of Latin because I was forgetting more Latin than my senile Latin professor was teaching me. He mumbled at times about grammatical forms or changes in the vocabulary. The only thing that I can distinctly recall was his repeated statement that certain changes in the stem of third-declension nouns were the results of nasalization. But he never explained what this process was.

In college I did continue with Greek and read plays by Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, and a number of Plato's Socratic dialogues. By this time I could read Greek fairly well and would have much profited if I had had someone to open the doors leading to Greek poetry, philosophy, and history. I would have learned something about the Greek mind and the nature of Greek culture. But the teaching was incredibly dull and almost wholly philological. Indeed, it was not until I got to Oxford in the early 1930s that I came to realize that I had gone through something like the pattern of studies pursued by many of my British colleagues. I think that in fairness I must say that my college career, from 1924 to 1928, was not a disaster. I met there a few students

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and faculty members who changed my life by awakening in me a keen interest in English literature. I was exposed to a variety of courses, and in four or five instances, I took courses that had superb teaching. Nevertheless, I think that my liberal arts college handled me without much care or even concern.

I did learn from my college experience one very important thing: though great books can convey much through themselves, with how much more force they impinge when they are well taught. Granted that the selection of the proper books is important, good teaching is almost as important. One might say that if the reader cannot truly read well, it hardly matters what he reads. I am not willing to go quite that far – but I am sorely tempted. Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* taught mainly as a philological text has its value and can give even the simple reader much, but it was not until I heard Bernard Knox's magnificent lecture on *Oedipus the King* given first in 1948 at Yale that I came to realize how great and powerful that play is and how well it can teach twentieth-century Americans about the relations of power to knowledge. The fact that the plot is set in an age thousands of years before our own, far from disabling the application of the play, enhances it. The basic situation is presented, as it were, nakedly. It is an extreme manifestation of a situation universal to mankind.

When I first began my college teaching, the importance of the proper teaching of profound works, including the teaching of literature, was intensified. While Robert Penn Warren and I were teaching at the same university in the 1930s, one of our assignments was to teach sections of a required course that amounted to an introduction to literature. It was assumed, quite correctly, that our students needed help in reading fiction, poetry, drama, biography, and even the essay. The textbooks that had been assigned to us to use for this teaching actually provided very little help. They informed the student of facts about the writer and gave something about his sources and his background. But the students knew so little about reading that many could not distinguish the difference between a good book and a bad. What to do? Warren and I decided to write a textbook ourselves, one that would try to address this matter. Indeed, as it turned out, we wrote two such books. I can't claim that our books solved our local problem. Our department colleagues, by the way, were scarcely gratified by our efforts. I remember that one of them thought that it would be much better if, instead of offering a course on how to read, we substituted a course on Shakespeare. His point was that it would be a shame for one of our graduates to go out into the great world and have to admit that he never had a course in Shakespeare.

I heartily agreed with him but wondered whether the student's claim to have read Shakespeare would amount to more than dangling a

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kind of fake trophy from his belt. If his reading of Shakespeare meant no more than that he had duly turned the pages but had got little meaning from them, could he be said to have read Shakespeare? The real problem was that our students were incapable of much serious reading of any kind. No one in his right mind wanted to narrow the scope of anyone's reading. But the ability of our students to read any good work was the serious issue. I certainly wasn't attempting to remove Shakespeare from the canon. Was I. A. Richards attacking the canon when he made a similar point in 1929 in his famous *Practical Criticism*? You will remember that that book grew out of a study that he had carried out at Cambridge University. Richards had asked his Cambridge honors students in English to write comments on poems, the names of the authors of which he had carefully omitted. Some of the students did well enough; a great many of them, however, failed miserably, for, lacking the author's name, they could not determine whether the poem was excellent or a piece of sentimental drivel. They simply could not cope with the poem as such. Their view of it depended heavily on the reputation of its author.

Such, however, was not the issue, and is certainly not the issue that now confronts us if we look at the present attempt to remake the canon. The present dissatisfaction with the canon has nothing to do with the charge that it lacks literary merit. The point urged is that none of us can make a case for his judgments of literary merit in any objective sense, for there is no such thing as literary merit in the present attack. The claim is made that the texts included in any canon were put there, not because they possessed any special literary merit or any philosophical wisdom. Not at all. Richard Johnson has put matters thus: "Analysts need to abandon once and for all both of the two main models of the critical reader: the primarily evaluative reading (is this a good/bad text?) and the aspiration to text-analysis as an 'objective science.' "

It is plain where such a notion leaves Matthew Arnold's praise of the "best that has been thought and written." The argument is that there is simply no way of measuring literary worth. Any textual analysis is simply a subjective fiddling with the text and has no objective value. Therefore, the choice of what texts we ought to have our students study must be made on very different sorts of grounds. Those grounds are frankly political. Although the new revolutionaries undertake to overturn common sense and a centuries-old tradition, their radical notions do fit certain popular ideas so well that they are easily accepted without much thought and do not require any profound verification. But what is meant by "objective science"? If the writer means the kind of verification demanded by the physicist or the chemist, for example, he will certainly not find it in any instance of literary analysis, but then think of what else he will not find capable of this kind of proof. How many of the princi-

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ples by which we live can be proved with scientific exactness?

In a highly interesting essay entitled "The Frontiers and Limits of Science," Professor Victor Weisskopf, a distinguished physicist at M. I. T., sums up as follows:

> . . . important parts of human experience cannot be reasonably evaluated within the scientific system. There cannot be an all-encompassing scientific definition of good and evil, of compassion, of rapture, or tragedy or humor, or hate, love, or faith, of dignity, and humiliation, or of concepts like the quality of life and happiness.

Indeed, outside the "hard sciences," very little discourse could qualify as verifiable truth, including, let me repeat, the major laws and customs under which most of us conduct our lives. The newest critics, then, having rejected literary merit as the basis for any canon, frankly accept political concerns as the warrant for selecting our great books and go on to indicate the aim of their own political concerns: they want to create a new, more democratic society. America is increasingly multicultural. Why not then require cultural courses that will recognize this fact and include elements of Asiatic, African, Amerindian, Hispanic, as well as European culture? (But the culture of the Iberian Peninsula is European, is it not? Yes, indeed. But I am not trying to be logical here. I am simply using the terms actually used by our New Revolutionaries.) This new plan is indeed democratic in the sense that it sees that everybody gets represented. Everyone (or at least most of us) will find something in his studies that should make him feel at home.

The sentiment is indeed generous in spirit. Who wants anyone to feel left out? But as for culture and education, the scheme is hopeless, for it rests on a complete misunderstanding of what literature can give and needs to give to any culture. It shifts the issue from the acquisition of knowledge and disciplines to that of social therapy. It can be argued that such a notion is un-American. Indeed, Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., as a social scientist, has made just this point. Professor Diane Ravitch, of Teachers College, Columbia University, has also stated her sharp objections to this kind of multicultural teaching. It should be of interest that the folly of such programs is thoroughly apparent to many more scholars than simply a few old-fashioned English professors, like myself. A number of recent tests have shown how little many of our students know about American history or even about world geography. They have evidently been fed on a very thin cultural soup. To add to it a few extra bits of cultural information will not suffice. Rather than informing and clarifying, this procedure will simply confuse. Students do need more information. They need to learn true facts about our world, but they require

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most of all some pattern of reference – some way to understand how these facts hold together in a comprehensible scheme. But a multicultural course or series of courses will hardly supply a significant pattern. In sum, the positive suggestions of our newest literary critics do not seem promising or persuasive. They amount to abandoning as meaningless what might be called literary study. If we want to use literary works at all – and for a start, better call them simply texts – they would teach them for what they might yield of political, historical, and sociological information.

As for the negative accomplishments of our newest literary critics, they are mostly exercises in debunking. This poem can be shown to mean just the opposite of what it has always been thought to mean; the novel, properly read, seems to have no definite meaning at all. But most of what is claimed by these newest critics to be new often represents no more than an extreme distortion of something that is not at all new but rather that has been known for a long time: for example, the varying senses of certain terms or the ambiguity of certain phrases. Obviously debunking carries with it a good deal of excitement and generates comment – even fame. But in view of the exaggerated claims made by some of our critics and their frequent violations of common sense, it seems likely that this new cult of destruction will wear itself out and that matters will settle down once more. Perhaps they will, but it is possible that something deeper, something promising continuation, is at the bottom of what had seemed to be not much more than a temporary fad. I am thinking here of a loss of interest in literature – even a certain contempt for it. Instances in my personal notice of these traits go back over forty years.

In the late 1940s I was at a small scholars' meeting in New England. I met there a bright young instructor, or assistant professor, who was teaching at Harvard. He was intelligent, somewhat unhappy, and his unhappiness clearly included his feelings toward his profession. Later we got into conversation. It turned out that he had become something of a Communist. Clearly he found his profession of teaching English literature unsatisfactory. Literature seemed to him to do nothing and to be going nowhere. It was a rather absurd by-product of a decadent civilization. But one could use it, he had come to realize, in order to teach Marxism. It turned out to be a way to get some good out of a rather useless body of knowledge. I don't remember the young man's name, but I do recall this thinking well enough to be sure that I caught a certain note of sarcasm with which he referred to his profession as an English teacher. I wonder whether he is still alive and, if so, he has read Frank Lentricchia's recent statement, "Literature is inherently nothing, or it is a body of rhetorical strategies waiting to be seized." The young man I met had

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the point long before and had seized upon it for his own purposes.

A few months after this episode, I gave a lecture in Atlanta and met a married couple who were insistent that I dine with them that evening. They were both teachers of English, enthusiastic, lively, eager to tell me their story. They, too, had come into difficulties – with their jobs and with their marriage – but then they had discovered Sigmund Freud. His work had saved their marriage and given them a satisfactory life work. While their subject was officially literature, what they really were teaching was Freud. It was really easy to do. His theories gave them something to talk about in almost any novel or poem that they had to teach. In short, their profession earlier had come to mean nothing to them, but now literature could be meaningful. They were almost deliriously happy with what they had discovered. But they were now teaching in effect psychology, though they were officially teaching literature.

I wonder how many people get trapped into teaching English and then find the job not particularly interesting, but refuse to remain stuck in what seems to them a meaningless enterprise. Some of them, obviously, have sought and discovered a way to use it – not necessarily to promote Marxism or Freudianism, but to promote some other movement that they believed needed promotion as they moved along the pathway toward the proper ideal society. I say, I wonder, for I certainly do not know, but I have been aware for a long, long time, of English teachers who find their work dreadfully dull. Such, however, I concede, are personal observations. One must be careful not to generalize too readily from them.

One need not, however. There are current movements that are highly visible and that may indeed bear upon our problem. I want to mention one in particular. We live in a highly technological society. It has devised for mankind some of the most intricate and beautifully discriminating machines ever seen as well as some of the most powerful. What modern medicine has been able to do to cope with certain diseases would have seemed to earlier generations truly miraculous. But the range of accomplishments has gone far beyond medicine or any other particular art or science. Whatever the horrors of the nuclear weapon, its invention and development represent in terms of pure fabrication an enormous extension of man's powers. Or consider our having put men on the moon and bringing them back alive and well. It was truly a marvelous event and, quite apart from what good it may or may not have accomplished, as a technical feat it was superb. It is no wonder then that we have been deeply impressed by such accomplishments. We have been profoundly affected by them and, most of us, affected in ways that we have not fully understood. We have, for instance, been confirmed in our belief that at last man is truly the master of nature – or soon will become so: that his

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ability to use nature and sometimes even reshape nature is immense; and that at least theoretically man has found, or can soon devise, the means to do almost anything he seriously wants to do.

Yet, what about the problem of ends? Our command of means has become very great: there is no doubt of that, but where do we stand on purposes, values and ends? Has science or its application as technology prescribed not only the means but the proper ends for human beings? Indeed, can it? I am thinking here of the passage I quoted to you earlier from Weisskopf's essay, "The Frontiers and Limits of Science," that there can be no scientific definition of good and evil or of the quality of life and happiness. However, it is verification by scientific tests that actually determines what many of us regard as genuinely true. That is to say, the world of means can be verified rather accurately. If we don't know the quickest way to get from Boston to Toyko, we are confident we can quickly find out. The proper way to prevent an attack of gout has been found out for us if we are patients of a competent physician. But the realm of ends is much more problematic, more subjective, indeed largely a matter of taste, as many of us have come to feel.

How do we choose what we want to be and how we want to live? Many say, let me make enough money and I'll know better than anyone else how to spend it. The earliest universities were primarily concerned with ends. Today universities, or their students at least, are preoccupied with means. More and more students go to college to learn how to get a good job. At least that is what the statistical reports tell us. Since 1970 the number of students enrolled in the humanities has dropped by half. For the humanities have historically been concerned with ends, not means. They have taught (or at least been thought to teach) not how to make a living but how to live. Yet in our day most people seem to believe that our mighty advertising industry will best teach us how to live – what kind of house to own, what kind of car to buy, what kind of spouse to marry, and so on.

So it may be no accident that when our technological studies flourish most vigorously, it is then that our humane studies have become distracted, confused, and often are admitted to be in themselves just rhetoric, meaning nothing. In sum, our increasing confidence in our knowledge of means and our uncertainty about any objective basis for choosing ends may have had something to do with the notion that literature is mere rhetoric and that any one interpretation of a poem or story is just as good – or as little good – as any other.

I am even tempted to see the present disarray in literary affairs as a residue (or, if one prefers, a blossoming) of ideas that have been with us for a very long time. I am not thinking here particularly of the Greek Sophists but of the beginnings of the Enlightenment. A book entitled

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From Enlightenment to Revolution, written by the late brilliant scholar, Eric Voegelin, makes the point quite sharply. In his chapter on Bossuet and Voltaire he writes that Voltaire:

> . . . was deficient in spiritual substance and he was vulgarly irreverent. His surprising range of solid knowledge was coupled with an equally surprising ignorance concerning the more intricate questions of philosophy and religion; as a result his judgment was frequently superficial, though delivered with authority. He has set the style for brilliantly precise misinformation, as well as for the second-rater's smart detraction of the better man. He was ever ready to sacrifice intellectual solidity to a clever witticism. He introduced to the European scene the unhappy persuasion that a good writer can talk about everything, that every unsound utterance has to be considered an opinion, and that irresponsibility of thought is synonymous with freedom of thought. In short: he has done more than anybody else to make the darkness of enlightened reason descend on the Western world.

Yet Voegelin goes on to say, "Still, Voltaire is not superficial. There is in him a quality which is praised in such terms as his spirit of tolerance, his common sense, his indignation at scholastic obscurantism and at bigotry, his hatred of oppression and persecution, his advocacy of freedom of speech and thought." One is caught by the phrase "the unhappy persuasion that a good writer can talk about everything. . . ." Our contemporary intellectuals are very articulate and often use the language well, but their utterances are often not intellectually sound. One is caught also by the phrase "the darkness of enlightened reason." It very well describes one of the principal features of our present culture in which there is vast information about certain aspects of our world coupled with a firm dismissal of other important aspects of the human condition.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment went on to dismiss knowledge that was not useful. Scientific knowledge was valued but contemplative knowledge was set aside as useless. "The acquisition of useful knowledge," Voegelin goes on to say, was "considered quite intelligible, but why should men devote their energies to the acquisition of useless knowledge?" What Voegelin calls the *bios theoretikos*, the contemplative life, disappeared from the calculations of these heralds of positivism. They ignored, or else did not know, "that the life of man does not exhaust its meaning on the level of utilitarian desires and needs, and that the life of contemplation, resulting in the understanding of man himself and of his place in the universe, is a fundamental spiritual obligation quite independent of its contribution to 'useful' activities." So here, I take it,

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again appears in slightly different terminology the point I was making a few minutes ago about the present-day attack on activities that concern the ends of human life rather than the study of means. Means are obviously useful and knowledge about them can be acquired. But literature may indeed easily seem to be in itself nothing, and its only useful role to teach us modes of persuasion that might be put to some really useful service in recommending something else.

Such a view seems to me woefully wrong. To reduce literature to something relatively meaningless – to an exercise that has as little to do with serious concerns as, say, has contract bridge or chess, is to make a ruinous mistake. Thus, I have chosen to make literature the principal matter of my defense. For various reasons it is certainly the most vulnerable item for attack. Millions of our citizens who have never heard of Derrida and who will never read a line written by J. Hillis Miller have no use for literature. They never read it. They would concede that a man like Shakespeare, safely dead, might attract tourists to his birthplace and thus become an economic asset, but a poet sitting in the next room is a joke.

If one can make a case for literature, one has made a case for the arts generally. And there is a case. If we can observe through great literature how human beings behave, how they succeed and how they fail – how they justify their lives or how they fail to do so, we may enrich our own lives. Literature engages us in the total human situation often much more deeply and powerfully than philosophy or even history does. Yet I must not in concluding lead any of you to feel that I would play down the other great thinkers of the past. If we are to talk of some sort of canon, any version of it must include such names as Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Virgil, Julius Caesar, and so on down the ages. In this very personal paper in which I alluded to my own first encounters with the canon, I mentioned my encounters with Homer, Xenophon, Sophocles, Virgil, Plato, Caesar, and Euclid. Can students of one culture learn from the masters of another culture? Will they remain always alien? The question has been pushed even further in our time. Can a woman learn from a man? Or a man from a woman? An honest answer will depend on a number of conditions and circumstances. But I see no reason why one can't answer generally, yes. It is foolish to assume that each of us is sealed up in some private and impenetrable envelope.

The Dean of Yale College has recently spoken on this point with eloquent authority. A few weeks ago, in addressing the newly-arrived freshmen, Dean Kagan spoke as follows:

> In response to those who claim that Western culture is relevant only to a limited group, it is enough to quote W. E. B. Du Bois, the

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> African-American intellectual and political leader, writing at the turn of the century in a Jim Crow America: "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I walk arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of the evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn or condescension. So, wed with truth, I dwell above the veil." For him the wisdom of the West's great writers was valuable for all, and he would not allow himself or others to be deprived of it because of the accident of race.

Gertrude Himmelfarb: I wish I had something to say by way of disagreement with Mr. Brooks; it would make for a more interesting session. Unfortunately, I have nothing but admiration for his paper and am in entire agreement with it. All I can do is to illustrate it from another perspective.

Let me start by saying something of my own very different initiation into a very different "canon," as we have since learned to call it. The popular expression (at least it was popular in my childhood), "It's all Greek to me," applied in every sense to the *Iliad*; it was certainly not my chidhood reading. My parents could not have read to me even the most simplified and Anglicized version of that story for the very good reason that, as immigrants, they read English haltingly and for utilitarian purposes. Besides, reading to children was not part of their tradition.

What was part of their tradition, an important part of it, was a very great respect for reading and for books in general – all books; I don't think they realized that there were bad books. But they did know that there were great books, books to be revered. These were the books that we would now call the religious canon, which included not only the Bible (that is, the Old Testament) but also the commentators on the Bible. A friend reminded me the other day that in his home, as in mine, if you dropped one of these books, even a paperback schooltext of Genesis, for example, you kissed it when you picked it up. It took me a long time to learn to be casual about books, to underline without feeling guilty about it, even to tear pages out of paperbacks – but never, never, out of hardcover books.

I was introduced to another canon (still not the classical canon of Mr. Brooks) in school. My school was as remote as could be from Mr. Brooks's prep school in Tennessee; mine was a neighborhood public school in Brooklyn. It was, I later realized, the very model of the melting pot. The teachers were mainly Protestant (or so I now suppose from the few names I remember), while the students were almost entirely second-generation immigrants – Italian-Catholic and Russian-Jewish or

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Polish-Jewish, with a very small sprinkling of blacks – also second-generation, in a sense, their parents having emigrated from the South. Unlike Cleanth Brooks, we did have courses in civics – on the Constitution, the electoral system, the relationship between the states and the national government; we had to be taught what he knew by osmosis. And while we did not have courses in personal hygiene, we did have weekly line-ups where we displayed our nails, ears, and other not so very private parts for examination. (I later found out that we were mainly being examined for head lice. Occasionally a child would be sent home with a mysteriously sealed note; at the time I didn't understand why dirty ears or neck warranted so precipitous a departure.)

We were introduced in school (high school more than elementary school) to a canon, a secular canon that was foreign to our parents but that they completely approved of and respected. (In the course of time some of it became less alien to them; Shakespeare, for example, was translated into Yiddish and presented in vigorous productions in the Second Avenue theaters. *King Lear* was a great favorite, because it was interpreted as the archetypical immigrant experience of assimilated – "Americanized," as was said – children rejecting their aged old-world parents.) Our canon consised almost entirely of English and American literature, with regrettably, none of the classics that Cleanth Brooks read, not even in translation. Apart from Shakespeare, my most vivid memory is of *Moby Dick*, where the chief assignment (this is the only thing I remember about this class) was the preparation of a glossary of nautical terms – an exercise that familiarized us with the use of a dictionary but with little else. We knew at the time that this was not the right way to approach this book, but we had no doubt that it was an important book, a good book, different from the Mary Roberts Rineharts and other thrillers that were our normal, extracurricular reading fare.

I've said enough, perhaps too much, about my own background. My point, of course, is to show how different it was from Cleanth Brooks's – not in race but in almost every other respect – gender, class, religion, ethnicity, region, community, customs, education. We did not share the same canon; unhappily, we still don't – I'm afraid I never repaired the deficiencies in my education. But we do share a respect for particular great books, for the idea of great books, and for the Western culture that gave rise to them and that sustained them. We also share a conviction of the universality and accessibility of this culture – which is why I am as moved as Mr. Brooks by the statement by W. E. Du Bois, who came from yet another social milieu – and racial as well – and who so elegantly affirmed the "transcendent" value of that culture. "Transcendent," as you know, is a pejorative term in the vocabulary of the new "pluralists," who believe we can "relate to," as they say, only

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our particular conditions and situations. Du Bois reminds us that Shakespeare and Balzac, Aristotle and Aurelius, speak to all of us, regardless of race, class, or gender – that unholy trinity that today dominates the university, distorting the curriculum and demeaning all of us by suggesting that we cannot transcend the limitations of race, class, and gender.

At this point, perhaps I can summon up a shade of difference – or perhaps it isn't even that – with Mr. Brooks. Of course, I agree with him that reading Shakespeare, or, for that matter, Melville, mechanically, ritualistically, without really understanding them, is not really reading them. I. A. Richards's famous experiment with his students, the assignment to comment on poems without knowing their authors, was devastating. I can remember the excitement of reading Richards's *Practical Criticism* many years later, and of reading the books by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *An Approach to Literature* and *Understanding Poetry*. The "New Criticism" was an important intellectual influence in my life, partly for the sheer intellectual energy it generated, partly for the intellectual, textual rigor it insisted upon.

Nevertheless, I would not belittle the role of authority in literature, the reverence for the author as well as the book itself. The student who could not say whether a book was good or not without knowing its author was obviously getting less, much less, out of the book than the student who could make a well-informed judgment without that knowledge. But the student who came to a book prepared to respect it, to try to understand it, simply out of respect for the author was, I think, on his way to a better understanding of it. At the very least he knew that a wiser man than he had written it – wiser in the judgment of generations of wise men – and that he ought, therefore, to make a serious effort to understand it – to understand it before presuming to pass judgment on it.

Just the other evening, before coming to this conference, I was reading the latest issue of *The New Criterion*. It is a particularly good issue, and one of the best pieces in it is a moving account by Joseph Epstein of his own experiences teaching literature to college students. Having just completed a successful course on Henry James, he recalled the first time he himself read James, in a course given at the University of Chicago by a friend of Mr. Brooks's, Morton Dauwen Zabel. The book that was his introduction to Henry James was *The Spoils of Poynton*, which has as its central theme the collection of antique furniture that the family had lovingly acquired over the course of generations. Joseph Epstein says of it: This doubtless must have seemed rarified – rarified in the extreme – to a Middle Western boy, to whom the entire notion of 'antique' held not the least interest. How much of the novel I could be said to have comprehended, I cannot say. Yet I came away with respect

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for it, which was in part owing to the respect I had for the respect in which my teacher held it. I did at least grasp that Henry James was serious stuff, and that if one day I were to consider myself a serious literary man, I should have to return to him.

Now this was almost exactly my experience, my introduction to anything that might be called a canon. I read many books in high school and even in college which I knew then I didn't properly understand. But I did respect them because I respected the authority of the people who taught them – not so much the particular teachers I had (who were not very impressive), but the profession, more specifically, the consensus in the profession that these were good books.

I think it is only now that we can appreciate the consequences of a widespread disrespect for the author – for the authority of the author, as the deconstructionists say pejoratively – or, still more pejoratively, the authoritarian authority of the author. The disrespect for the author has patently led to a disrespect for the text; if the author lacks authority, readers or critics can do with the text whatever they like. And if there are no great authors, there are no great books. Superman is as worthy of study as Shakespeare. Comic books are as properly a part of the curriculum as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. And the Bible itself, as Harold Bloom has recently shown us, is the literary creation of the critic; J, the author of parts of the Bible, now identified by Bloom as a lady aristocrat in the court of Solomon (or was it Solomon's son?), turns out to be the alter ego of Bloom himself.

This last point, the latest event in the deconstruction of the Bible, returns me to my earlier remarks about my personal background and may justify my indulgence in autobiography. For in retrospect I can appreciate how important it was that the first books I knew to be great were the Bible and commentaries on the Bible, which were indubitably great because they derived from the divine author, God Himself ("Himself," if you please, not "Herself") – or, in the case of the commentaries, from the most learned and pious transmitters of the divine word. While I have since lost my faith in that divine authorship, I have retained a faith, so to speak, in His creation, a reverence for the ancient texts that are deserving of the greatest respect. One does not have to believe in God to believe that Harold Bloom is no God.

Nor does one have to believe in the sanctity of all texts to believe that there are great ones, secular ones, that are also worthy of respect, and that they should not be made the occasion for a display of the critic's ingenuity or vanity or presumptuousness. In this sense the secular canon is the heir to the religious canon. And this brings me to the other personal experience I referred to earlier, my first encounter with *Moby Dick*. I can now see that, in a perverse way, it was a salutary experience.

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For I, and my schoolmates, knew at that time that Melville was a great writer and *Moby Dick* a great book, even if we did not know why – indeed, even if everything we were taught about the book (the definitions of all those whaling terms) made nonsense of it. We knew that if it seemed nonsensical, it was the way it was taught that was nonsensical, not the book itself; and it was that conviction that made it possible for me to go back to the book many years later, to reread it and discover some of its real meaning.

Edmund Burke once explained why received opinion is an essential adjunct to reason: "We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages."

I think there is a lesson here for us today. It may explain why it is reasonable and proper to ask students, even scholars, to approach the past with an *a priori* respect, to give it, as Burke elsewhere said, "the presumption of wisdom and virtue," to accept, at least provisionally, until disproved by powerful evidence, the judgment of posterity about great writers and great books. This calls for an initial suspension of private judgment in favor of authoritative opinion, the collective opinion of generations. And it is because we value that collective opinion, the "capital of nations and of ages," that we are properly insecure about our judgments of contemporary literature – which is why, as Lionel Trilling brilliantly argued, contemporary literature should not be taught in schools and universities. It is also why the new edition of the Great Books, while adding (tentatively, as the editors tell us) some early twentieth-century books, stops short at midcentury, to give us time to think about the latest creations of our culture and to evaluate them, to see them in the larger perspective of the great books of the past.

Mr. Brooks quotes Eric Voeglin who said of Voltaire that he was "vulgarly irreverent." That expression perfectly expresses the attitude of so many academics today – "vulgarly irreverent" toward the old canon and, one might add, "vulgarly arrogant" about the new (the canon based upon race, gender, and class). It is as a corrective to that irreverence and arrogance, as an exercise in intellectual humility, that we might take Burke's dictum to heart – supplementing our own small "private stock of reason" with the "capital of nations and ages."

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Professor Moses.

Wilson Moses: I'm happy that Professor Himmelfarb has been autobiographical. That way I don't feel so presumptuous. And I'm also happy that you mentioned *Moby Dick*.

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For the past fifty years the academy has been split over the question of whether historical and sociological methods are appropriate to the concerns of literary scholarship. It is the perpetuation of this debate and not the issue of remaking the canon that dominates Professor Brooks's remarks. It may seem surprising that the director of an African-American studies program finds very little to disagree with in Professor Brooks's paper, but that is, in fact, the case, and as I proceed with my remarks, I believe the reasons why will become evident. In the course of my response I shall be concerned with two ends. By engaging in the medieval and Catholic tradition of disputation, on which this conference is founded, I hope through dialogue to shed new light on timeless truths in the content of Professor Brooks's essay. I shall be precise about exactly those areas where I disagree, but I intend to spend the greater part of my commentary addressing those areas where we are fundamentally in agreement.

Professor Brooks has pointedly reminisced in the opening lines of his paper on the central role of language training in prep schools attended by comfortable Southern white youth before World War One. This variety of education based in the study of foreign language that he experienced, and perhaps even enjoyed, certainly represents a worthy ideal. Unfortunately, there are very few Americans who are willing to pay for language education today. Bilingual education is supported primarily by ethnically-focused communities, which are obsessed with their cultural heritages and seeking to pass them on to their children. With the exception of those who support Hebrew schools, Islamic schools, and Spanish-speaking schools, there are very few Americans who are committed to training American youth in foreign languages. Perhaps Greek and Latin are not sufficient to meet the needs of American youth in the present age. It may be that studies in Russian, Chinese, or Persian would better suit the needs of modern school children, but there can be no arguing with Professor Brooks's point that we would do well in this country to return to the good old days when language study was the basis of all learning in the humanities. Such training would certainly make a difference in how we approached the study of literature.

Since my own foreign language abilities are sadly limited, so too must be my reminiscences on the pleasures of reading a great deal in foreign languages. I am told that the subtleties of Japanese can never be mastered by anyone who has not learned it as a child and that it is impossible to capture the essence of the *Koran* in any language but Arabic; however, I am also told that much of the best that has been thought and written is native to these traditions. I found this a humbling idea, when studying German some years ago at the Goethe Institute. I had among my colleagues many students from non-Western countries who, in addi-

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tion to knowing their own traditions, displayed a remarkable interest in European and American arts and letters. With one of them, a young Japanese businessman, I struck up an acquaintance, based on our common interest in Verdi and Puccini. He had studied English as well as German, in school, and he wanted to know my opinions on the poetry of Wordsworth. Even if I had not been a college professor, he would have expected me, an English-speaking college graduate, to be familiar with Wordsworth.

My introduction to the canon began, as did Professor Brooks's, in early childhood. I was five years old and almost through kindergarten, when my mother was discharged from the tuberculosis sanitorium where she had been since shortly after my fourth birthday. She was awfully happy, and yet anxious, about being reunited with her children and eager to make up for lost time. And I, after spending a year with my grandmother in Chicago, was fascinated with the rediscovery of this beautiful, vivacious mulatto woman, whom I could scarcely remember. My mother delighted my sister and me, shortly after she brought us home to Detroit, with the story of a mad sea captain named Ahab and his travels in search of a white sea-maggot named Moby Dick.

She introduced us to a set of books that is still among my most treasured possessions, a series of twelve volumes edited by Olive Beapré Miller entitled *The Book House for Children*. The purpose of this series was to introduce children to the literatures of the world by retelling the great myths and legends of all the world's peoples. Europe was the focus, to be sure, but African and Asian tales were also included, as well as American Indian myths and legends. The great thing about these books, although I did not know it at the time, was that they introduced us not only to the Western canon but also to the sociohistorical method of studying that canon; so from earliest childhood, it always seemed natural to me that literature and history, music and biography should go hand in hand.

The other element in Olive Beapré Miller's method was to insist on the moral power of storytelling. Great literature, in her mind, was associated with great lessons. In the twelfth volume of *The Book House* all the stories in all the volumes were indexed according to themes, that is, according to the moral lessons that they supposedly illustrated. If you wanted to teach your child about courage, you could turn to Book Ten, page 38, and so it was that my dark-haired, eccentric mother first read me the story of Beowulf. By the time I was twelve years old, I had dipped into Book Eleven, with its capsulated version of *The Divine Comedy* called "A Dream of the Middle Ages." It was there that I first saw the drawing by Gustave Doré of Francesca and Paolo, "hung together, poised upon the wind," and in a footnote I was informed that

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"The fantasia, *Francesca da Rimini*, by the Russian composer, Tchaikovsky, is based on the story of Francesca and Paolo, as given in this poem by Dante."

I don't know what good it did a little colored boy on the east side of Detroit to have this information, but by the time I was fourteen, I had pretty well worked my way through the two Tchaikovsky compositions that my father had in his collections of 78 rpm recordings, and when good old mom brought home a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* complete with all the Doré engravings, well, wasn't I in seventh heaven. I read the entire *Inferno*, although I didn't have the foggiest notion of what I was reading. But perhaps the story of Dante's devotion and the concept of platonic love saved me during my sexually deprived adolescence from many of the problems that befall black boys. I attended a Roman Catholic parochial school, where my two sisters and I constituted half of the colored population. Sexual puritanism was a good defense mechanism in that working-class German and Italian environment.

Not that I was unaware of my deprivation: I remember two lines from a poem that my father kept among his souvenirs of Morehouse College, entitled "Song of the Negro Dancer," which was my first introduction to Afrocentric romanticism:

> You should live naked, naked and free
> Where black skin is not God's curse

Wondrous sentiments, but as I said, I was puritanical, and most of my affectionate relationships were platonically focused on the Beatrices and Lauras within my circle of acquaintances. What really kept me so puritanical was the dominant myth of my adolescence, the story of Emmet Till, a colored boy from Chicago, who got himself lynched for recklessly eyeballing a white woman. The self-defensive puritanism had its true origins in the stoical example of my uncomplaining father, whose traditions were not unrelated to the puritanism found in the nation of Islam. I was, of course, aware of being black, but although I liked to fancy myself the descendant of proud African warriors, I identified strongly with the medieval traditions of Roman Catholicism. I was dutifully reverential towards the memory of George Washington Carver and worshipped Joe Louis like a god, but as a Roman Catholic, I also felt that in a special way, the heritage of Dante and Michelangelo belonged to me.

Like everyone else in my high school, I know by heart at least one Latin poem, the twelfth-century text by Thomas of Celano, and although I couldn't translate it word for word, I knew, in general, what

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it meant:

Dies Irae, dies Illa
Solvet saeclum in favilla
Teste David cum Sibylla.
Quantus tremor est futurus
Quando judex est venturus
Cuncta stricte discussurus
Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulcra regionum
Coget omnes ante thronum

When I was sixteen and in the eleventh grade, a darling Italian girl named Sheila sat in front of me in home room, presided over by the kindly Sister Jane. I still have the painting that I did of Sheila; she was one of those blonde blue-eyed Italian girls who look like Rhine maidens. I used to entertain her with songs and stories of Wagner, with tales of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and Fasolt and Fafner, and Hunding and the Dragon's blood, and the forest bird and Mime, and the magic sword. It was in Sheila's honor that I committed to memory Michelangelo's sonnet "To the Unknown of Bologna," which, it now occurs to me, I have not recalled for thirty years. I am astonished that I still remember any of it:

The blossoms twined garland in her hair
Delighteth so to cross her sunny tress
That flowers one before the other press
To be the first to kiss that forehead fair
Her gown all day puts on a blissom air
Clingeth then floweth free for happiness
Her meshed net rejoiceth to caress
The cheek whereon it lies and nestle there
More fortunate her golden pointed lace
Taketh her breathing in as close a hold
As if it cherished what it did enfold
And sacred zone that doth her waist embrace
Seemeth to plead, "Here give me leave to stay,
What would my arms do, if they had their way?"

Sheila was a quiet, pretty, and extremely shy girl who went to Communion almost daily. I was a clown and a show-off, frequently admonished by my parents and the devoted German nuns that if I did not apply myself more diligently to Latin and algebra, I would end up a

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ditch-digger. But although I was a confused black boy, living in a kind of limbo between the black and white working classes, I knew that perfectly good translations of Julius Caesar had been around for centuries. Why should I worry myself with Latin declensions when I could be learning sociology from the novels of Robert A. Heinlein or historical theory from those of Isaac Asimov? Or when I could hang out with the black boys in the neighborhood learning the story of "Shine," who was shoveling coal on the Titanic when she struck the iceberg, but who made it to shore after a fantastic adventure:

> Shine swam three days and he swam three nights
> And when he reached Detroit he was ready to fight
> When the news reached Detroit the Titanic had sunk
> Shine was on Hastings Street, sloppy drunk.

It was good to be initiated into the profane tradition which is part of the adolescent experience of black boys, but was this to be my self-image? Or should I seriously aspire to the ideals represented in the idyll of Launcelot and Elaine? What was Africa to me? Certainly it had no more reality than Lohengrin or Parsifal. When I started college at Wayne State University, I began to read W. E. B. Du Bois and learned of his fascination with German opera and the myth of Lohengrin. I joined the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, the fraternity of W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, and Thurgood Marshall, where I vowed to uphold the chastity of woman and paid lip-service to the knightly ideals of the following verse. I find it a perfect illustration of the principle articulated by Northrop Frye that the social and historical interest we find in a verse cannot suffice alone to raise it to the level of poetry:

> There goes man of high impulse
> Of princely mien and grace
> There goes a man of humble faith
> A credit to his race

No, although I find this verse interesting for historical purposes, I do not consider it a statement of much originality or literary interest. On the other hand, I find that Frye and others who attack the sociological method are often guilty of representing the arguments of their opponents only by the most grotesque and extreme examples. A concern for social, historical, and moral issues need not be a substitute for the joy of language, employed with wit and precision. I think, however, that we do a disservice to the Western tradition in literature when we ignore or seek to override those principles so often interpreted as the basis of Dr. John-

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son's critical theory, that the poet must "trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom."

I shall not presume to improve on Johnson's assertion that literary documents are social texts. Many of you are certainly aware that while Johnson understood that the human mind was influenced by institutions and customs, he also believed in "general and transcendental truths." This century has witnessed the permanent demolition of many truths that we once assumed to be eternal, such as our erstwhile faith in science, which is everywhere in shambles. And we need not travel as far as Saudi Arabia to discover the elusiveness of "transcendental truth." There are many reminders in our own American society that we remain as petulantly frustrated as Pilate in our search for the truth that will free us from conflict and violence.

I shall not presume to lecture this audience to the effect that literary documents are social texts. We have all heard and understood the contours of the discourse carried on by Horace and Sidney and Dr. Johnson down through the centuries. Professor Brooks, certainly, was acquainted with all the arguments, many years before I was born, and heard them delivered by persons more splendidly situated than I to defend the position. If he was not convinced thirty years ago by his reading of Graham Hough's *Preface to The Faerie Queen*, or forty years ago by C. S. Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost*, he certainly is not going to be converted by anything I have to say this afternoon. But for my part, I have never doubted that some great literary texts are overtly political and that others, while claiming to be universal, are unconsciously prejudiced. I knew this very well at the age of fourteen, when I read that Dante had the habit of putting all his enemies into Hell. My own observations convinced me that part of Shakespeare's art was to reveal ironies, ambivalences, and ambiguities concerning the role of Jews and Moors in a Renaissance Europe where Catholicity was anything but a synonym for universal tolerance. *Othello* was written in an environment that produced the following document:

> Her Majesty understanding that there of late divers blackamoors brought into this realme, of which kind there are already too manie, considering how God hath blessed this land with great increase of people of our owne nation . . . those kinds of people should be sent forthe of the lande.
>
> Acts of Privy Council, August 11, 1596

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I winced, at age fourteen, when I first read those lines, "Mislike me not for my complexion shaddowed livery of the burnished sun." Why, I wondered, must Tubal enter the Venetian scene with an apology on his lips? My discomfort, however, was nothing compared to that of William Ashby, a black man in the Yale class of 1916, who described a lecture on Shakespeare where the professor, while standing over Ashby, offered the following commentary:

> Let us imagine a scene something like this . . . Brabantio was deeply concerned about the fate of his daughter, Desdemona. Othello had not won her love fairly. He was a black man, a foreigner. He had captivated her by tricks, bewitched her by incantations, conquered my darling weak daughter by his eloquent boasts of thrilling tales of battles he had fought and conquests he had made. He has cast a spell over my daughter. That nigger wants to marry my daughter. I ask you gentlemen, how would you feel if a nigger asked the hand of your daughter? I am a Senator of Venice. This Moor seeks social equality with me. I call upon my friends, my attendants to "lynch this nigger."

"I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not," wrote Du Bois, but let us remember that Du Bois did not write his famous lines as a rebuke to black children or their teachers who, perhaps naively, believed in an Afrocentric curriculum. He wrote his words as an indictment of the attitude that still persisted years later, on the part of William Ashby's teacher at Yale. Let us remember that Du Bois became a defender of Stalin and that he died in exile in Africa where, as he fancied, "Socialism blossoms bold, on Communism, centuries old." Despite his erudition in the Western tradition, Du Bois was no opponent of Afrocentrism, far from it. He was one of the leading proponents of the Afrocentric world view, which he unveiled in the 1919 version of his poem, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," where Greek and Germanic mythology – memories of Ulysses and Brünnhilde – are transformed within a Hegelian web into a prophecy of African redemption:

> Dark daughter of the lotus leaves that watch the southern sea
> Wan spirit of a prisoned soul a-panting to be free
> The muttered music of thy streams, the whisper of the deep
> Have kissed each other in God's name, and kissed a world to sleep.
>
> The will of the world is a whistling wind, sweeping a cloud-swept sky,
> And not from the East and not from the West knelled that soul-waking cry,

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> But out of the South – the sad, black South – it screamed from the top of the sky,
>
> Crying, "Awake, O ancient race! Wailing, "O woman, arise!"
> And crying and sighing and crying again as a voice in the midnight cries, –
> But the burden of white men bore her back and the white world stifled her sighs.

I have often used this poem in my teaching, to illustrate the principle that mythological allusions reveal the constant changes that occur in a literary tradition as it moves through time and space. The contextualizing of poetry does not denude it of meaning; on the contrary, it adds layers of complexity, irony, and ambiguity to the meanings with which an active mind may endow it. If working through a poem can be seen in the same way as the weaving of Penelope's tapestry, then the processes of construction and deconstruction should be perceived as a perfectly normal and traditional way of maintaining things as they ought to be. I think Professor Brooks is correct when he says that there is nothing new here.

I suppose it would be begging the question to ask for empirical demonstrations of Professor Brooks's claims concerning the science-worshipping tendencies of contemporary society. I have an intuitive feeling that while he may be right, he is almost certainly overstating his case, and that the sources of the current crisis in literary studies are elsewhere than in knee-jerk scientism. Furthermore, it is difficult to discern a genetic connection between our current, sometimes divisive ethnocentricism and those cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment, immortalized in Schiller's "Ode to Joy." As Peter Nozick has argued in *That Noble Dream*, scientific objectivism is in serious difficulty at this time. Neither social scientists nor historians are able to take it seriously, and as for the hard sciences, they are perhaps in even greater difficulty than the humanities. My impression is that most American intellectuals born since 1940 are terribly frightened of science, which in their experience has bred numerous Frankensteins. Ask any dean of any graduate school in any American research university, and you are likely to be told that we are having tremendous difficulty getting American students to pursue the doctorate in engineering, the sciences, or the applied technologies. The situation in medical schools is equally disturbing, for I have been told that the quantity and quality of applicants has been declining for several years.

It is not rationalism that has gone wild, but a recrudescence of romantic, evangelical nationalism, that is at the basis of this current wave of

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ethnocentrism. Leopold Senghor, the poet president of Senegal, and one of the inventors of Negritude, one of the manifestations of the Afrocentric movement, speaking at the Frankfurter Buchmesse in 1982, specifically disavowed any connection between Negritude and the Enlightenment, except as a rejection of it. Senghor insisted that Francophone Africans, like nineteenth-century Germans, had created romantic nationalism in reaction to Enlightenment rationalism and what he saw as its byproduct, French imperial expansion. Afrocentricity has numerous definitions, and I am not certain that I have understood or considered every possible meaning that the term might have. But if I have any understanding of what it is that the Afrocentrists hope to accomplish, I believe it is no more and no less than a way of easing black students into a study of the general and transcendental truth, through the gateway of the specific. They are seeking a concrete universal or an objective correlative, on which to anchor a more abstract and generalized perception.

I am therefore happy that Professor Brooks chose to conclude his presentation with the quotation from W. E. B. Du Bois. The fact that he has done so demonstrates a good awareness of the Afrocentric aims that are understood by some of the movement's most far-sighted advocates. More important, it also shows the humanity, the decency, and the capacity for continuing growth of one of the foremost representatives of the American tradition in the humanities.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much, Professor Moses. We now go on to Professor Abel for a last prepared comment.

Lionel Abel: When I had read Cleanth Brooks's excellent paper on the canon, I at first despaired of having anything to say against it, in which case, considering that disagreement is the soul of discussion, what would I be doing on this panel? Coming upon Mr. Brooks's initial quotation from Voegelin, in disparagement of Voltaire, my heart, as the poet says, leaped up; it was as if I had seen a rainbow in the sky, which is to say, the promise of a real argument. And then the rainbow faded, and my hope along with it, as I read a second quotation from Voegelin, pointing up Voltaire's great traits of character and mind. Was I being put in the position, to me intellectually ignoble, of having to agree with someone else for a change? And then I saw a way to extricate myself from what looked dangerously like an *entente cordial* with Cleanth Brooks. To be sure, I could not take exception to what he said about the canon. But while he did not fail to note that the canon is more complicated and diverse than people generally imagine it to be, he spoke of it only in the large, which left it open for me to speak of it in the small, at the extreme limit, in the minute.

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Let me note first of all that there is a small, a tiny amount of truth on the other side of the argument, held by those whom Mr. Brooks and I claim to disagree with. How shall I put it? There is always the possibility when judging a given work, even a masterpiece, of finding fault with it on one occasion, indulging its faults on another. Such indeterminacy of some few threads of insight may not apply to, or necessarily alter, the entire garment of final judgment. The error of Frank Lentricchia is that he thinks it does. But we who hold to a general canon concede that it is not obdurate against all variation, and that some of its variations may even be politically motivated. Brecht's plays got a better press during the radical sixties than they can hope to get nowadays. But to admit that much is not the same as to admit that the judgment of Brecht was, is, and has to be completely biased.

I recently came across a new book by an author whose name, Danah Zohar, promised its contents would intrigue me. And so they did. Ms. Zohar's book, entitled *The Quantum Self*, has an arresting thesis, namely that we should see the self in the light of ideas borrowed from quantum mechanics, probably the greatest intellectual discovery of our century. Ms. Zohar suggests that we regard the self as altered in important ways by any examination of it, even as Schrödinger's quantum cat may be said to have been killed by the very look at it meant to determine whether it was alive or dead. I suggest that there is a quantum canon, situated in a field of our continually changing judgments. For to think of the literary canon as fixed forever, or even for an entire epoch, is to disregard some of the most subtle aspects of literary analysis.

Here is a story that may help to make this matter of a quantum canon somewhat more concrete. I happen to agree with Lionel Trilling's judgment that Nabokov's *Lolita* is an outstanding novel. But when he and I talked of it, I could not accept his further judgment that it is a great book. Nor could I agree to his claim that the theme of the novel is love rather than sex. Very probably I held to the same literary values which to Trilling were canonic, and yet here was this not inconsiderable difference between us when it came to judging Nabokov's novel. I am reminded here of Wittgenstein's remark that there is no rule about how to apply a rule. Why did Trilling think *Lolita* a love story? His argument to me – I think he stated it somewhere – went like this: adultery is no longer a basis for the experience of guilt in lovemaking, hence Nabokov had little choice but to make his lover a criminal of sort and hit on making his Humbert a child molester. Unhappily for Trilling's view in this matter, a child molester can hardly convince us of his love or devotion. Nabokov's Humbert is very cruel to Dolly Haze; he destroys her home and separates her by force from the very men she wants to be with. It is truer to take him as her persecutor than to take him, which Trilling

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did, as her lover. How, one wonders, could so fine a critic as Trilling have gone astray? Perhaps it was the atmosphere of the academy, whose influence on writers this conference is supposed to address, that obscured or clouded his vision.

In confronting a truly original work like *Lolita*, the critic is best advised to look for something similar to it in the literary past. Trying to find something resembling *Lolita*, I was reminded of an episode in *The Magic Mountain*, not one of romance but of erotic obsession: Hans Castorp's infatuation with Madame Chauchat. I particularly remembered how he manages to get an x-ray of Chauchat's diseased lung, and then treats it with the reverence a medieval knight might have shown for a lock of his lady's hair. And I was struck by the likeness of Castorp's feeling for the lung x-ray to the feeling about Dolly her molester has put into words: "My only grudge against nature was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out and apply voracious lips to her . . . lungs, her comely twin kidneys," a remark that, as Leona Toker notes, "suggests a touch of necrophilia and the possibility of violence."

Now Hans Castorp is no more in love with Madame Chauchat than Humbert is with Dolly Haze. But we take Castorp's feelings more seriously than we can those of Humbert. This is not simply because there is nothing criminal in Castorp's obsessive interest in Madame Chauchat, and there is something criminal in Humbert's manic control of Dolly. The reason Castorp's grotesque behavior does seem more real and more serious to us is that his creator, Thomas Mann, has set it against a background of romantic metaphysics, tying love to death, the exceptional to the humdrum, the bourgeois to the bohemian, while founding these binaries on an ultimate dualism, that of nature and spirit. Now there are no ideas of such tradition-packed force behind the acts and rationalizations of his acts by Humbert, and so Nabokov is unable to lift his hero's deeds, thoughts or feelings by any other means than his own remarkable use of words, which though extremely well-chosen, are insufficient to make us even like Humbert, let alone take him seriously. All the romantic poets of Germany urge us to take Hans Castorp seriously. The only voice speaking for Humbert in this way is that of his creator, Nabokov.

But to return to Mr. Brooks's paper. He told us that men can learn from women and women from men. That is a judgment, of course, to which I cannot object. But let me try to qualify it. There are some things women should not learn from men. To be clear on this point, let me call your attention to the claim recently made by Harold Bloom that the J of certain important books of the Bible happens to have been a woman. And there was the claim made almost a century ago by Samuel Butler that the author of *The Odyssey* was a woman. Years ago when I mentioned to Jean Wahl that Samuel Butler thought Homer was a

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woman, the French philosopher replied that this disturbed him not a whit, adding, with a smile, that he would indeed be disturbed if it could be shown that Corneille was a woman. I share Jean Wahl's feelings on this matter, and going still further, want to suggest that Corneille was a writer from whom women should not try to learn. In explanation of this, let me read a few verses, excellently translated, from "Stanzas," a poem by Corneille:

Lady fair, if on the page
Of my face traits elderly
Show, remember, at my age,
Yours will little better be.
Time to all that is most fair
Loves to offer his affront;
He your roses will not spare,
As he furrowed hath my front.
The same course of star and star
Rules the days of you and me:
Folk have seen me what you are;
And what I am you will be.
Charms you have, that men adore;
But this other, that you scorn,
Well may last, when yours of yore
Have been long ago outworn.
I the glory of your eyes
can preserve for ages new
And cause races yet to rise
What I choose believe of you.
'Midst the newborn nations, where
I shall in some credit be,
You will only pass for fair,
Inasmuch as pleases me.
So bethink you, fair Marquise:
though a greybeard fright the eye,
He is wroth the pains to please,
When he fashioned is as I.

tr. John Payne

Could a woman learn from this poem by Corneille? Should a woman want to? I think not. Of course a poetess, Adrienne Rich, for instance, could learn something from Corneille's technique. But she could learn as much about technique from other poets, including those of her own sex. Should a woman want to learn anything from

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Corneille's sentiment? Here my answer is a forthright "no." It would take a thousand years of lesbian affairs, duels and courts of love to project an eroto-arrogance equal to that expressed in his poem by the naturally macho Pierre Corneille. But now Sherry, Marjorie, Anna, Doris, Pauline, Florence, Gertrude, Gloria, ladies, would it be worth that long a wait?

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much, Lionel Abel. Mr. Brooks, first, would you like to answer?

Cleanth Brooks: No, I don't think I need to make any answers. I've been very cheerfully and comfortably handled, it seems to me. And whether this is out of reverence for my gray hairs or whatever, I'm happy with the kind of reception my little talk got.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Now we'll open the discussion to the floor. Please raise your hands, and we will recognize you in turn.

Catharine Stimpson: I'd hoped that I could sit quietly, but I do want to just make a couple of points. Part of *Lolita*, that I wish you had mentioned, Professor Abel: Dolly Hayes is twelve years old when it starts. There's a radical difference between Nabokov and Thomas Mann there. You cannot read *Lolita* or the double, treble, quadruple ironies that Nabokov is doing with his creation of Humbert Humbert without confronting squarely the fact that Dolly Hayes is twelve when she is first seduced, raped, whatever you want to say, by the man who then becomes her stepfather. The second point: We can disagree about Adrienne Rich's poetry, but I think it has to be taken a bit more seriously than you did.

To Professor Himmelfarb: The authority that passed on Melville, I think, raises a host of questions about the canon of some intellectual seriousness that we probably should discuss. If we were to look at the authority of the past on Melville, which past would we take? Pre-1920 or post-1920? And I think that Melville is a wonderful example, and I'm glad you brought him up, of problems when we look at canon formation, because of the shifts in taste. And don't you think that one of the intriguing questions about the formation of the canon, which is an exercise in intellectual history, is how did Melville's reputation shift?

Edith Kurzweil: Would you like to answer that, Professor Himmelfarb?

Gertrude Himmelfarb: At this point, I think it would be very helpful if we could simply credit any past. What disturbs me in the academy today is the tendency to discredit the past *per se*. Even to enter into a dis-

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cussion of the evolution of taste or the evolution of critical judgments, in relation to Melville, for example, assumes the importance of those judgments, the judgments of the past. Of course there were changes of taste and judgment, not only in the case of Melville but of Shakespeare. Look at what the nineteenth century made of Shakespeare, or what the Germans did when they "übersetzt und verbessert" him. As an historian, I can hardly fail to credit the fact of change. But I also credit the fact that a consensus finally emerges, at least in regard to the greatness of particular books (if not to the interpretations of those books) – a consensus based upon experience, analysis, and reasoned judgment.

This is why I introduced the subject of the new edition of the Great Books, where the editors confronted just this problem. The previous edition stopped at the end of the nineteenth century. When the present editors decided to enlarge this edition, to bring in more recent literature – to expand the "canon," if you like – they chose a new cut-off point. They decided not to consider any book published after the mid-twentieth century because they believed that they did not have the perspective of judgment that would permit them to speak with authority on more recent books. And even for that earlier period, they admitted the new books on sufferance, as it were. When he was pressed on this point, Mortimer Adler explained that the new books represented, in effect, nominations rather than actual admissions to the canon – provisional recommendations which might or might not survive the test of time.

There is nothing fixed or rigid about such a canon. What is fixed is the principle: that some books are great and that we have a tradition – the "Western tradition," as it is called – that deems them to be great. My quotation from Burke was meant to make this point, to suggest that the accumulated wisdom of the ages is more reliable than the judgment of any individual.

David Thorburn: I must confess that as a defender of the canon myself, I don't feel that those people who wish to defend it have made a strong case today. If this is the best we can do, the canon is in grave difficulties. But I realize one should be brief, so I just want to pose one specific question to Gertrude Himmelfarb: If you talk about the necessity to respect *prima facie* the general wisdom of the past, how can you make such a recommendation when you know that those who established the canon belonged to a particular, very tiny elite of society that excluded women and minorities, that restricted access to higher education? Isn't it also the case that the kind of canon you're describing (if we're supposed to accept the accumulated wisdom of some group of noble wise folk in the past) excludes an enormous range of what we might call the popular

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culture of individual societies? In fact, only a very tiny minority of what we might call the learned culture has established what you're calling the canon. Now, I think there is a way to defend an idea of greatness in literary and other kinds of intellectual work, but we're not going to get very far simply by appealing blindly to some wisdom of the past. And I wonder whether you could articulate a more powerful justification for such a consensus.

Gertrude Himmelfarb: I gather that you think that it's somehow a disqualification on the part of learned men to have been learned. You ask me: How can I accredit the idea of a canon which has been formed and put in place by a very small "elite"? I credit it because of the results that have come down to us over the ages, which generations and even centuries have endorsed and confirmed – and not only men but women, blacks, and people of all races and classes. Shakespeare was not, in his day, a member of an "elite"; his plays were enjoyed and appreciated by the populace as well as the learned. They were, in fact, part of the "popular culture." If they are not today, that is a reflection on the impoverishment of our popular culture, not on the "elitism" of Shakespeare.

David Thornburn: What do you make of the fact that the canon you're describing is primarily Christian, so that Jews and Muslims and American Indians and a tremendous range of other cultural possibilities were simply excluded from their consideration? Why should we believe that this tiny group, identifying a relatively tiny group of texts, is worthy of a kind of thoughtless reverence? Why can't we say: Yes, they may have been wise about the texts they liked, but let us at least acknowledge that the texts they knew nothing about might also be worthy?

Gertrude Himmelfarb: The point was made earlier – and made very well – that there is a difference between representation and merit. I do not recognize representation as a legitimate criterion. The final judgment has to do with merit – the worth and greatness of the idea or book. This was the criterion of the learned and wise in the past, and it seems to me we cannot do better than that.

Edith Kurzweil: May I just add something? Some women were included, such as Willa Cather and Jane Austen. And let us recall to begin with, Professor Brooks talked of the transcendence of the canon, of the change. And he did not argue that it consisted always of the same people.

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Cleanth Brooks: The canon is the product of a culture, as a matter of fact. And as a culture widens, it may accept other constituents. But basically what is being called the canon now is made up of the books, the great books, of the Western tradition. It varies, it has varied all along. Books are dropped, books are added. This is why I was so very careful in my talk not to try to give you any details. At least, I did not want to be involved in bickering about just what books made up the canon. In general, however, we know what most people think the culture is, and we know that it has changed in the past; we know it will continue to change. It seems to me that if we're looking here for absolute distinctions, then it's a waste of time.

Gertrude Himmelfarb: Edith, may I comment on one of your remarks. You said that the canon includes women, and you cited Willa Cather and Jane Austen. I deliberately did not make that point because I don't want to play that game. That's like playing the game of numbers – the quota game – which is equally irrelevant and demeaning.

Lionel Abel: I would ask the speaker if he doesn't think there's a certain wisdom in the legal tradition, which requires us to place a very great weight on precedent, so that when a case is tried, the opinion of what the courts decided years before is most important in the judgment of a new case. Now according to you, this would be folly. Yet without such a reliance on precedent, you couldn't even have the institution of the law.

David Thornburn: This is an uncomfortable position for me, because I also - and I think much more powerfully than many people in the audience and even at the podium - have a fundamental investment in what you may imagine to be the canon. But this is no reasonable way to talk about great art or great books. None of you, with the exception of Professor Brooks, have discussed the actual content of these works. The fact is, greatness is not some big abstraction. You act as if this is very unproblematic. How can we admire the greatness of a text which systematically is committed to the idea that women are inferior to men? Isn't it true that Shakespeare actually believes that women are subservient to men in *The Taming of The Shrew*? Now it is incumbent on people who offer the reified conception of the canon, as you, Professor Himmelfarb, do, to explain how you can justify or defend texts whose obvious, explicit themes are so deeply offensive to what you as a thinker and as a moral person would regard as acceptable.

Edith Kurzweil: Please, other people would like to talk, and we don't

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want to make this a personal thing. Next is William Phillips, after that Jean Elshtain.

William Phillips: I want to respond to Professor Thorburn's challenge. First of all, he's asking too much when he expects people at a conference or panel, when they speak of the greatness of the tradition, the greatness of individual writers - Shakespeare, Dante - to demonstrate at each point why Shakespeare is great or why Dante is great. Fortunately or unfortunately, in critical discourse we have to make certain assumptions that we agree on certain things. But I'd like to go on to the notion of the canon. He asks for an alternative or a better description of the canon. I don't want to offer a better one, but to clear up a certain amount of misunderstanding. It's assumed by many people who question the canon - and I'm using "the canon" even though it's the wrong term (as has been pointed out) – that the canon has been created by committees of wise men or committees of scholars through the centuries; that they sat down every fifty or seventy years and said: Now, what's included in the canon? And then made lists. And finally, we discover that it includes an awful lot of people, from Aristotle to T. S. Eliot, even to some people sitting here in the audience. Unless we understand how it works, we'll have endless futile discussions. The so-called canon, or I'd prefer at this point to use the word tradition, has been created by creators in the field. In other words, Aristotle's preeminence or Plato's preeminence as philosophers was demonstrated by the deference given to them, by the use of their theories by later philosophers – by Descartes, by Spinoza, by Husserl, by Heidegger, and so on – even though disagreements existed. That's number one. When you think of poets: the tradition of poetry and the notion of the great poets of the past has been carried forward by writers of poetry and by great practicing critics, so that there is a continuum, as it were, of poetry. There's also a continuum of criticism; there's a continuum of fiction. For example, we know that no contemporary writers of any ability, of any stature, are ignorant of the past. They learn their trade, as it were sharpen their talents, by reading the writers of the past. And then, of course, they make their own additions. All this has been written and been quoted ten thousand times, as it appeared in Eliot's great essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." One other point: obviously there are corrections of taste and changes of taste, and that's a cliché constantly referred to in order to prove that there are no standards of judgment. But these differences and corrections of taste occur within certain limits. Nobody has ever said that Shakespeare was an idiotic writer; that Dante was a person of no talent, that he was some kind of lug; or that John Donne was a phony. The point is that the magnitude of their ability and the accomplishment

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have been generally accepted, although there are shifts of taste occurring through the centuries. And these shifts of taste, let me point out, occur within the continuum I'm talking about: the continuum of literature and of philosophy. Unless we recognize this, we're going to think that some kind of committees make up these lists that are then handed on to us – by males or Christians or whites or what not. And when we say that Shakespeare was a great writer, and we accept his greatness, it is not because of his view of women or his view of men or his view of blacks - that really is a very small element. It is obvious that Shakespeare's rhetorical power and recreation of personal tensions and conflicts on various levels of social existence is what has attracted later generations of critics and poets and dramatists to Shakespeare. It is not a question of whether we agree or disagree or whether we like the fact that he didn't treat Jews properly. If we're going to talk about the history of literature in terms of whether Jews have been treated properly, then we have to dismiss all of literature. We'll have to forget about literature. But that isn't the point. We don't read writers of the past to find out how much they like Jews.

Jean Elshtain: The image that I drew from Professor Moses's very eloquent comments was of something I might call a permanent agon; that is to say, an ongoing contestation - you and the works you love, the works with one another, read over time by diverse groups of people, creating what might be called an agonistic community, ongoingly poised between contestation and conservation, between rootedness and freedom, between tradition and change. It seems to me that that is what constitutes a tradition. If we drop off one or the other of those poles, we lose the richness and the agonistic nature of this creation over time. Now, having said that, let me talk very briefly about my own tradition, which is the tradition of political philosophy. It wasn't until the women's movement of the sixties that certain important writers were, so to speak, rediscovered. I'm thinking of Mary Wollstonecraft, who can now be read as she saw herself, as a person in an argument with Rousseau. But for years, she dropped out of that picture all together. When we put her back in, we got a much richer sense of this ongoing, agonistic community, in which people are engaged with one another. To lose dimensions or parts of that, for them to fall out, is unfortunate. And it is sometimes political and social activism and movement that remind us of what has been omitted. Then we complete the conversation, so to speak, and we are thus reminded.

Elizabeth Dalton: Professor Moses, you said you thought works of black writers could be used as a kind of point of transition for bringing

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black students into the mainstream of the canon, or something to taht effect, to help them recognize their own experience in the canon. And I wondered: Do you think that is the only appropriate use for works of black literature: Would you say something more about that?

Wilson Moses: Yes, I'm giving a paper, "Four Definitions of Afrocentricity," at the Du Bois Institute. I limit it to four to show my traditionalism. The way Afrocentricity was dealt with in 1913 is very different from the way it's being dealt with by some of its defenders today. And I wouldn't want to say there have been decade-by-decade changes, but there was a time when the way Afrocentricity worked was to show how likely it was that Pushkin really thought of himself as a black man and not just technically as an octoroon. That sort of question is really an intermediate sort of question. That is, that the first generation was concerned with telling people that they did have this Negro ancestry; this meant a lot in 1913, because we still had people changing races by crossing state lines. You could be black in Louisiana and white in Virginia. These books often were written by people who had little or no discernable trace of black or African ancestry, as in the case of J. A. Rogers, so they were interested in showing that these figures were black. Then you have a different kind of emphasis, I think, in two varieties of Afrocentricity today, one of which focuses on East Africa. I accidently came across the East African tradition while doing a biography of Alexander Crummell, who was the first black American educated at Cambridge. He had a colleague when he was a missionary in Liberia who was white, sort of aristocratic Anglican (low-church Episcopal, really), the Bishop of Liberia, John Payne. John Payne, interestingly enough, was a white guy sitting in West Africa, sick half the time with malaria, writing articles to prove that the Pharaohs were black. But the other variety of Afrocentricity focuses on West Africa, not on East Africa, so that you have one variety which I call the Egyptian heroic or monumental style; the other, which is the folkish or proletarian style, focuses on West Africa and is more concerned with the retention of African cultural traits in the New World. These are the contours of the discourse that exists. It's more complex than that, but, roughly speaking, these are the kinds of issues that are unfortunately not often enough discussed because there isn't sufficient reverence for the past, even during Black History Month, to talk about how the various changes in the concept of Afrocentricity have occurred.

There's more than one approach, and more than one goal. One friend of mine said, I don't care if you tell them (students) that Shakespeare was black; if I can get these kids to read Shakespeare, then I'm willing to tell them that. I don't know if I'm willing to go quite that

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far, but I'm going to contest this question now of neo-segregationism and separate black curricula for black boys. I think we have to raise all kinds of interesting questions – not only the question of Afrocentric curricula, but questions such as the influence of matrifocal societies, whether Audrey Lorde or Jesse Helms is the worse enemy of black boys. Questions like that have to be addressed, too. Since my job is to be an historian of ideas, I suppose I'm more inclined to look at it all as a series of questions rather than as a set of answers. But I wouldn't want to suggest that the approaches taken by people like Henry Louis Gates are incorrect. I think that what he is attempting to do and what those of his particular tribe are attempting to do is to create a new way of looking at the world, and that this new way of looking at the world will be better and will be more humane. I think that's what he has in mind. I don't think, however, that Afrocentricity necessarily needs to take one in that direction. And you will recall that when Gates defended Afrocentricity in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the foremost proponent of Afrocentricity, Molefi K. Asanti took umbrage at his approach, since Molefi is committed to the East African perception of Afrocentricity and Gates has been more associated with the West African. And then there are debates between the Francophone and Anglophone Africans, too, although the Francophone Africans insist that their inspiration came from German scholarship.

EK: Thank you. That was very illuminating.

David Lehman: I have a very concise question. I wonder if you perceive the assault on the canon to be primarily an assault on the idea of a canon or on the specific composition of the "great books" that you and I read in our college courses.

Cleanth Brooks: Well, I, as I think it was perfectly plain, dodged the whole matter by refusing to say: this particular set of books is the canon. That raises a discussion that's impossible for us to deal with here, and I don't see any point in dealing with impossibilities. What I was very much interested in is a different question. As canons are reshaped, books dropped, people added, what are the principles on which we make these changes? The view of some of the revolutionaires who say, "There is no such thing as literary merit, forget it, it doesn't exist, use some more rational basis," seem to me woefully wrong. What is the basis on which one makes or remakes the canon?

I got into the matter of reading the canon without ever knowing there was a canon. I grew up with it or with at least an aspect of it. But if I had now to sit down and make up a canon, I think I'd go crazy

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very quickly. On the other hand, I have utter confidence in saying to you that there is a canon. I think I can suggest books that almost everyone would agree to put in it: I think I would suggest others to which most people would say, oh no, not those. But I'm perfectly willing to leave the canon in that loose state, and I think that is the only state in which we can deal with it. If you want any other, then you'd better get some highly organized academy, have them draw up guidelines, make the proper elections, and so on and so on. But few of us want that nonsense. We couldn't get such a thing done anyway, yet that's the only way you can have every item duly certified: this book has a place in the canon.

Edith Kurzweil: May I just say one word. I would like to pick up something that came up yesterday more than once. I think one of the problems we face is that we used to be a reading culture. Now we are very much a reviewing culture, so what is read are reviews of books, and this restricts our knowledge of books. And then we move on from there and decide how much of this restricted reading we can get in. We decide what we are going to pick, and then we get to reading on certain topics, rather than doing as Professor Brooks has said.

Gertrude Himmelfarb: This reminds me of my own initiation into this controversy. When I first confronted it, the question that was always raised concerned the particular books comprising the canon. And the demand that was then made was that the canon be expanded to include worthy but neglected books by women, blacks, and so on. Very quickly, however, that issue escalated, and the terms of the argument changed. Professor Brooks is quite right to say that the important issue is not so much the specific books in the canon as the fact that there is a canon, that there are great books, and that the idea of greatness is something to be valued and cherished. This point was dramatically brought home to me during a panel discussion not unlike this one, when the head of a Women's Studies department explained her objection to the canon. The canon was patriarchal, she said, not only because it doesn't give proper place and recognition to women, but because it dignifies and exalts the ida of greatness itself, which is a peculiarly masculine idea. You people (meaning me) have created a canon of "B. G.s" – "Big Guys" (this was my first introduction to that term) – and the trouble with "B. G.s" is not only that they are "guys" but that they are "big." A proper canon, a feminist canon, would exalt not bigness or greatness but littleness – the little things that women historically, in the past and the present, have valued, the little things that are part of their daily lives, their nurturing functions and personal relations.

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That was a very instructive experience for me, for I then discovered that the argument about the canon had undergone a significant evolution. Today critics of the canon may be found at different points of that evolution. There are those who argue about the content, the specific books, of the canon; there are those who criticize the idea of any canon; and there are still others who progress to the final point of rejecting the idea of greatness itself.

Kevin Mulcahy: Roger Shattuck reminded us several times yesterday that we don't have a canon, we have a syllabus. All right. Let's say that we then have a canonized syllabus. In the light of the disagreements expressed in this room and, say, at Stanford, is there any possibility that such a syllabus, such a corpus of somehow agreed-upon works that as Professor Brooks put it, "engage the human condition," that such a syllabus could occupy anything like a major place in university education?

Edith Kurzweil: It seems to me that almost every professor makes up his or her own syllabus; we're fairly free.

Kevin Mulcahy: I was thinking more of a Great Books program, a Columbia Experience, some kind of required survey of these books.

Gertrude Himmelfarb: There are such programs or subdepartments in some colleges – oases, as it were, within a larger institution catering to those few who seek that kind of education. But I don't know of any serious attempt to establish a uniform curriculum for an entire college – apart, of course, from St. John's, which has never departed from that conception.

Cleanth Brooks: I might say something I hinted at in my lecture. I think the great problem in American schools is teaching people how to read. We've got a vast number of illiterates who don't read at all. That's where the real pressure is: get them to read something. Try to get them to read something serious. The canon business would take care of itself, it seems to me. It's a practical element in some instances, but I could get along whether we had a canon or not. I would still have authors that I depend on and think are worth teaching.

Catharine Stimpson: Just a factual point in answer to your question, how are syllabi devised? Thank God in America we have local control of the syllabi, and it's a faculty matter. So the process of syllabi formation, the process of what's taught, varies from place to place. In some places faculty have choices, in some places they don't. But there's no simple

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answer because we don't have a national curriculum. If I might also say, Professor Himmelfarb, in my participation in and watching of the canon debate, there's not been a development. It's worked on three levels, and they've been worked on simultaneously. At the first level is the opening up the canon to include works that have been irresponsibly excluded; at the second level is the study of the process of canon formation, for example, the kind John Guildery does; and at the third is the questioning of greatness and universals, which has been there, I think, from the beginning - say from John Rhode's *Death of the Author* in 1968. So I don't think the debate has evolved; all three of those levels have been operating simultaneously. Just one final point (and I think you'd all agree with this): it's not what is taught, it's also how it's taught. I have spoken in several places lately, including at the M.L.A., saying that if I were asked to give a required course with a required text, it would be the Holy Bible. And this is how I would do it. These are the ways in which we would look at it and place it historically. So I think we also have to look not simply at content but also at context.

Desktop Publishing in the University

Edited by JOAN N. BURSTYN

These nine essays examine the effects of desktop publishing on professors and students, librarians, and those who work in university publications departments and at university presses.

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The Writer and the University

William Phillips: This morning's session is going to be different. It's the finale, as it were, the last movement; we have three writers and critics here, and each one of them is going to make an opening statement of about five or ten minutes.* After that, I will fire some questions at them, and then the session will take on its own momentum. People will argue, talk, agree, disagree. You know what writers are like.

The people up here really don't need any introduction. We'll start on my right, in the red jacket is Cynthia Ozick; in the green dress is Mary Gordon; in the gray jacket is Czeslaw Milosz. A couple of the speakers are professional teachers. In addition to being writers and critics, they're full-time teachers. The others have taught occasionally. The order is alphabetical. Mary Gordon.

Mary Gordon: Since I am a writer who spends a good part of her time and makes a good part of her living at a university - I am a professor of English at Barnard College - I have listened with an interest that is not at all abstract to what has been said in the last few days. If we're at least in some way to focus on the question that this panel is meant to address, what is the place of the writer in the university, we should have some sort of realistic understanding (whatever reality is, extra-literary or otherwise) of what the university is really like today. Otherwise, we can respond only out of some sort of private fantasy or private demonization.

I think that many of the important questions that vex the life of the university have been asked in the past few day, but what I'm concerned about is that the terms in which the questions have been asked and answered have been rather uncritically presented. An example of terms that I think have been used as if we all understood precisely what we meant by them are "reason" and "greatness." Professor Berger talked about rational discourse and the loss of reason, the loss of reasonable conversation in the university, as if we all understood what reasonable conversation is, and as if there were some other conversation going on which took place outside the realm of reason. None of this was defined. What would the opposite of reason be? The irrational. What would the irrational partake of? I think this was never examined or discussed. And I think this is a part of the kind of demonization of what Professor Berger called "Caliban's Children" - the people who arrived at the university in the sixties and stayed on to get tenure. Professor Himmelfarb yesterday

*Editor's Note: Harold Brodkey and Christopher Ricks, who also participated, did not want their presentations and comments published.

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spoke about "greatness." And she said that we all understood that "the canon," which was never examined either, should be treasured, taught, and presented as the most valuable of what has happened in human history because we all understood its greatness, and we understood its greatness because great men in the past had said it was great. And because Edmund Burke said we should all pay attention to the wisdom of those who have gone before us. For Professor Himmelfarb, we all understood what we meant by great, and we all understood that simply to have the authority of unexamined, unnamed men who have lived before us, who have been called "great," was enough reason to present this body of knowledge to students as being important. In the past few days, I've heard an unwillingness to examine what has been said, and I think its source is a sense of beleaguerment and besiegement on the part of a lot of people who are speaking. It is certainly not my intention to question people's sense of beleaguerment - if one feels beleaguered, one feels beleaguered - but I think that too needs to be examined and named for what it is.

I think at work is a sort of fantasy of the Golden Age of the University, which existed perhaps between the years 1910 and 1964. And I think that is something that also needs to be examined: what in fact was going on in the university? Was it a place where enthusiastic, eager, docile, hungry students sat at the feet of eager, enthusiastic, generous professors, all of whom agreed upon the same important things? I certainly am not going to question what people's experience of those years was, their experience was their experience, but perhaps they did experience that as a golden age because for them it was a meeting of particular needs, which were local to them. I think in that age the university may have met the needs and aspirations of a group of people whose goals were fully to enter the mainstream of the dream of Europe; a dream which needed for its embellishment, for its treasured image of itself, a corona of high culture: music, art, and literature, which corresponded to the taste of the haute bourgeois. To be haute bourgeois at that time, you needed to appear to be reading books, you needed to own books, you needed to have them in your house, you needed to be seen attending particular concerts, to be apprehended watching particular kinds of theater, you needed to have on your walls particular kinds of pictures that had a particular relationship to the old masters of the past, and the kind of conversation that you had with the past was very limited by the fantasy of the dream of Europe. We don't live in that world anymore. Now it is perfectly possible to be a professional, a lawyer, a physician, a psychiatrist, a teacher, and to talk about *L. A. Law* rather than Garcia-Marquez. It's perfectly respectable. You can enter into the realms of the haute bourgeois and have as your topic of conversation Woody Allen

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and you will not lose status. That is a new thing in the world. And that is the world that we live in. No one will think the worse of you. So, for people like all of us, whose pulses are caused to race, at least in part, by the poetry of John Donne and the plays of Sophocles, we're in a difficult time and we are experiencing grief and mourning. And I think that needs to be named and needs to be addressed. We writers of serious literature are ever more radically marginalized. Our day is almost up. But I think we should acknowledge our grief and our mourning with a kind of openness. And we really do need to examine why, if what we value is so important and if it is at all sensible to use the word "transcendent" in the way that Professor Himmelfarb used it, why that which we have valued is less valuable to the rest of the world. We have to ask ourselves whether taking an ever more embattled position will help us genuinely to share the values we believe in with people who are in fact others. We have to be honest about the limits of what we value. We have to remember, for example, that *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* was played at the gates of Auschwitz, that Himmler played Bach, that the Nazi regime grew up in a climate where the high culture that has been so valorized flourished, as perhaps never before in the history of the world. Now that is not to say that we should not treasure what we in fact treasure, but we should try to examine why it is that this is what we treasure. It is, after all, what we grew up learning and hearing, and more importantly perhaps, what we grew up learning and hearing called valuable. But when we uncritically use words like "transcendent" and "great," it is a defensive and perhaps deluded posture. I think it is important to realize in humility what there is of genuine beauty and importance that we have not heard and listened to, that does not come from the Western tradition; what there is of importance to what has been called living the true and the just and perhaps even the beautiful and the rich and even the pleasurable life; what we have not heard and listened to because we have been so busy defending our position that what we have heard as children, what we have believed is important, is truly great. I think that part of the demonization that goes on in the imaginations of some people is to believe that whoever they are, those Children of Caliban wish to practice a sort of mindless affirmative action - that if we just stick in a few things from Africa, pop in a few things from Asia, they'll all shut up and not throw bombs at the building. But I think what needs to be said is that other people - and most of the world is other people - have been hearing and listening to and apprehending and thinking in ways that can be enriching to us. I think the importance is to have a genuinely open and humble conversation in which we say: These things, for various accidents - historical and psychological - are important and beautiful and valuable to me. What is important and beautiful and valuable to you?

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There seems to be at work, as well, a notion that the canon grows up accidentally, that it is an almost organic growth like the growth of a tree. But I think that is also an unexamined assumption, because what we have to examine is what has been left out of the canon and why it has been left out. Again, this is not for some sort of numbers game in which we can say, oh good, here we have four women in our Humanities course, so we can relax. But I think, as Professor Elshtain pointed out in the case of Mary Wollstonecraft, if we do not hear the conversation of Rousseau which includes the conversation of Mary Wollstonecraft, we're missing something terribly important. I teach young people, and I think another misapprehension that goes on these days, although it's been addressed, is that the reality of teaching the humanities in most institutions is that many students have trouble reading and writing and most of the people who work in institutions of higher learning have to address that, and they spend their days slogging through that.

The other fantasy that I think has to be addressed is that there is, as a friend of mine said, some sort of guerilla curriculum that is in place at the universities and that students are not studying the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and Sophocles and Plato; they're studying *Vogue* Magazine or Madonna instead. It's just not happening. As a matter of fact, if you look at the curricula of most colleges there is a movement toward what might be called a core curriculum. And there is a perhaps unexamined concern that students should begin to read again the unexamined great books of the past. I don't think that if you look at what is actually happening in the majority of college classrooms, and at the people who actually do have power to create curricula on a day-to-day level - in other words, what students are actually doing in those four years - that you will see that what people fear is actually taking place.

Now, I think many of us, rightly or wrongly, feel marginalized. And this sense of marginality makes the place of the writer in the university more critical for both the writer him or herself and for the students that he or she interacts with. I think that the writer reads in a different way from what might be called the straight academic. The writer reads with his or her blood. What is at stake in a particular text is at stake in a different way for us, because we then go home and feel infected by what we've read and taught. And I think that sense of real engagement in the works of the past can give to students – if we're open to them, listening to them, and engaged in a conversation and a sort of community building – a sense of the liveliness, and the importance of these works in a lived life, in a way that is not at all abstract. I think that the writer can find a community in the university (that may be somewhat utopian, but we hope for it). But we have to remember that it is a community that includes the students, and I would hope that it is not a community

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where the writer takes the place of the high priest and anoints whichever students are alive at the end of the workshop after having battled each other with smart remarks until they're all in ribbons. You know, whoever's alive gets the name of your agent at the end of the semester. I would hope that there would be a community in which the writer feels engaged, not only with the life of the past but with the lives of the future, because we do have these young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. And if we really are in anguish about the books that mean something to us, let us realize that in these four years we are going to give our students a sense of what reading is and, one hopes, a notion of how to carry that into a future life. That's why what's in the canon is important, because it may be the last time for many of them that the experience of serious reading is going to take place in a very concentrated way. And that's why it is important to be open to what they need to hear - not in some craven way in which we lie down on the floor and say, like parents who are afraid of their two-year-old, "Tell us what will make you happy," but ready to hear from them what we may not want to hear. In other words, we may need to hear the students say, "What we want to hear may be something that you don't know about, but at least entertain those possibilities with humility." In my experience, I feel very involved in the formation of new writers and I think what I try to do and what I believe in is to provide or to try to provide what will nourish the students who in fact will carry on and modify the past but also absorb it in a heart-felt, lively and genuine way. I think in order to do that it's important to take a position that is not embattled, not defensive, that does not respond to a sense of the world having blown up in 1964, but a sense of being part of a community, at which really, after all, young people - the people of the future - are at the center. Thank you.

William Phillips: I think you're next, Milosz.

Czeslaw Milosz: This last month, four poets were hosted by the University of Kraków, Poland. They came from America. All of them are friends and translate each other, and all of them are connected with the university. Those poets were Stanislaw Baranczak of Harvard, Joseph Brodsky of Mount Holyoke, myself from the University of California at Berkeley, and Thomas Venclova of Yale. I stress this connection with the universities because it is not customary in that part of Europe or in the Soviet Union to have that connection which exists by necessity, by economic necessity, in the United States. Our visits were highly successful; there were enthusiastic audiences and contacts with brilliant young students. This leads me to certain problems of the canon and the teaching

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of literature. We should realize that the invention of the nineteenth century - namely, the history of literature - is still valid in an enormous part of the world. And students for instance in Poland come to the university after having gone through classes in the history of literature which traditionally, as it appeared in the nineteenth century, was an attempt at indoctrination of the young generations by the elders, as a preparation for life in society. Only the character of the indoctrination changed. People in Poland went through textbooks that gave a Marxist interpretation of the history of literature. But before, for instance in my generation, our textbooks had a different bias, yes? And of course the bias depends upon the interpretation given to history. So the history of literature is much more history than literature. But I see many virtues in the history of literature, because it is an attempt at organizing material which otherwise escapes organization. And it has at least mnemonic virtues. It is interesting to compare textbooks of the history of literature of various countries. Trying to write a history of Polish literature, which I did at last, I took for a model the old-fashioned textbook of Lanson, a French history of literature. I found it the most useful for the purpose of teaching, because what is a traditional textbook of the history of literature? It gives the characteristics of a period - social, economic, historical - and then, upon that background, discusses a given author. Of course there is a canon. Sometimes the canon has been invented by professors; "greatness" is sometimes invented by professors. But at least it gives a notion, placing in time various phenomena, to the extent that when writing my history of Polish literature, I was more concerned with giving examples of writers who may not be first-rate, but who, for instance, because of their comic value, their portrayal of manners, fit very well that given chapter about, let us say, the seventeenth century or the sixteenth century. Now the problem is how to proceed next. I don't know what will happen. Of course, big changes occurred in those countries, including a traditional separation between writers and the academic profession, because the academic profession was reserved for those with degrees, investigators of literature - as a Polish poet defined it, "investigators of insects' legs." But writers were completely separate; this separation was traditional, not merely an invention of Communism. I recall the anecdote that when he heard that Vladimir Nabokov was a candidate for a professorship at Harvard Roman Jakobson said, "Well, an elephant is a substantial animal, but there is no reason to make him professor of Zoology." Perhaps this situation will disappear, because of economic necessities in those countries. Also it is probably necessary that textbooks of the history of literature be completely revised, especially in high schools. As you know, in American high schools such a subject as the history of literature doesn't exist. I don't know whether it would be

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possible to have such a subject here, in view of the many different backgrounds and cultures of American high school students here. That's an open question. But certainly a revision of the textbooks in Poland is absolutely necessary because Marxist shibboleths are being dismissed, while a new principle of organization is lacking. I don't know. I am afraid that the first movement would be to introduce national if not nationalistic criteria, which is very obvious, for instance, in Lithuania, where I was born.

Thomas Venclova, a Lithuanian poet, appeared with me in Kraków, and we had a big discussion of the relations between Poland and Lithuania. And now, Lithuania and the Baltic states in general aspire to independence. And the Soviet textbooks, of course, are a complete distortion of the history of those countries. If new criteria are introduced, they cannot be but national. And this is, of course, a danger. But here I speak to a certain degree in the defense of the history of literature as something unavoidable, for the sake of structuring history. We structure history constantly; there is no way out, and we have to try to do it by limiting disasters. Thank you.

Cynthia Ozick: It seems to me that I should confess without delay that I arrived in Boston only last night. Consequently, I am unaware of the theses, arguments, points of view, and general intellectual shenanigans that have developed at this distinguished conference thus far. So if I address the subject of this panel, "The Writer and the University," in a seeming vacuum, either repeating what has been said before or oblivious to what has already been sufficiently thrashed out, I hope you will be willing to forgive the unwitting blunders of a latecomer.

The writer and the university: to juxtapose these – the writer, an idiosyncratic and solitary organism, and the university, a great collective idea, embodying the principles of conservation and transmittal of civilization - to juxtapose "writer" and "university" in a single phrase is, I am afraid, to commit an oxymoron. It's true that for some time now in our country, writers have been making their living through association with universities: poets, historians, philosophers, and those scribblers known as novelists have all earned their daily bread on the university payroll. The notion of a so-called independent scholar is nowadays unheard-of. The last one I did hear of - a poet studying Sumerian language, history, and civilization - was not an American, lived in London, and hung out at the British Museum Library while being mainly looked down on by the "real" Sumerian scholars, i. e., the ones with university positions.

But the prestige and influence of the university are not confined to scholarship. Poets teach college poetry workshops; novelists and short-

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story writers teach fiction workshops. By now all this has been going on for a couple of decades, and the system not only appears to be working, but also seems to satisfy everybody. The university is pleased to have a well-known writer on its faculty; the students are pleased, too, not only with a chance for close association with a dazzling name, but also with the opportunity of "learning how to write" from a successful professional; and finally, the writer is pleased, probably more than anyone in this compact, because she or he is getting paid, sometimes generously, for work that never used to have any formal recognition whatever. So no one can deny that there is a kind of congeniality, at least in current workshop practice, between the writer and the university. But the fact is that the writer's presence on the campus in this fashion has very little to do with the history of ideas; and the history of ideas is what universities are for.

I don't mean to imply that writers contribute nothing to the history of ideas. If "subjectivity" is an idea, if the unconscious is a revolutionary modern idea, then that idea owes as much to Proust, Joyce, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James as to Freud. And surely the elevation, even the exaltation, of the individual consciousness is a significant writerly invention - newfangled in the Romantic era and cut into fragments in our own. But there is a difference, after all, in the temporal cycles of writers and of universities. I'm speaking of their relation to the *zeitgeist*. We are uncertain about writers with regard to the *zeitgeist*. Do they embody it or do they create it? The Emersonian idea or ideal is that the writer ought to manufacture the tone of her or his time; and that, of course, is what all writers dream of doing and a very few have actually succeeded in doing. Concerning the relation to the *zeitgeist* of the university, however, it seems to me there is, or ought to be, no dispute at all. The university can neither create or embody the *zeitgeist*. The university is by definition a latecomer, a conservator, an assimilator of what has already been established as worthy of preservation. A university ought to be behind the times. A university ought to be immune to fads and fashions in ideas. A university is the last place where Matthew Arnold's passionate remark about the best that has been thought and said, a remark so much hooted at nowadays, ought to be hooted at. And a university is the first place where a less famous sentence by Matthew Arnold ought to be honored: "Try and possess one great literature at least," Arnold wrote, "unlike your own. And the more unlike your own, the better."

But set aside these curmudgeonly "oughts." Realistically viewed, pragmatically observed, the university is, in truth, about thirty years behind. The excitements and quarrels and polemics that surround the canon issue, for instance, are the product of what the writers were doing and

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saying in what we have come to call, all-inclusively and prototypically, "the sixties." Writers do affect, influence, even alter what is being said and thought in the universities, but not through any connection with the university - quite the opposite. Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg were not teaching college workshops when the one wrote *Armies of the Night* and a book in praise of subway graffiti as art, and the other wrote *Howl*; and yet it's their voices that reverberate in faculties now. What killed the immortal-seeming New Criticism? The civil rights movement and the writers who spoke for it, and also Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, with its celebration of disintegration. Now it is my own view that, though the civil rights movement belongs to the highest conscience of the country, in certain other respects the fruit of the sixties has not been uniformly healthy. But what is incontrovertible, I think, is that the tone of a time comes to fruition in the university roughly three decades after its initial promulgation. Writers who participate in university projects at the present moment are, whether they acknowledge it or not, in the rear guard. They are participating in the ideational and societal expression of thirty years before.

A salient example: the ideology of interpretive relativism, that sweeping popular belief in a free-for-all of meaning, wherein ideas are reduced to opinion, and opinion to cultural origin, and cultural origin to determinism, so that at the end of the process the mind that has boasted of its freedom to think without imposed prejudices becomes indistinguishable from the mind that is chained by its first circumstances. (A friend of mine at Harvard ironically calls the consequences of all this "body studies.")

So if writers want to influence universities, they ought to keep out of them. Universities replicate, and belatedly. They do not originate. If, let's say. Norman Mailer, on an impulse perhaps currently exhausted or superannuated, designed the present cultural atmosphere of the American university a quarter of a century ago, and without ever serving time on a faculty, what does this signify or portend? It means that writers writing now, not within but without the university, can similarly design what the academy will be thinking and believing and promulgating thirty years hence. For writers of originality, writers who hope to shape the *zeitgeist* rather than be shaped by it, this presents a formidable responsibility, a responsibility of the imagination. Maim civilization with your pen now, and your children will inherit that maiming in their freshman composition classes. Subvert the culture now, join in the subversion of the universities' capacity to inherit and conserve broadly, freely, and without the coercion of political embarrassment, and the university of the near future will resemble a latter-day Soviet junior high school. Or, dream the dream of intelligence now, and the university of the near future, in its

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role of assimilator for good or for ill, will know how to argue for intelligence.

William Phillips: Thank you. Now for a little while, I will ask a couple of questions, which some or all of the panelists may want to answer. Let me start by picking up on some of the things that Czeslaw Milosz and Mary Gordon and Cynthia Ozick said about the relation of the writer to the university. We've been talking for the last few days about the universities being hothouses of the new theories; that the theories have been flourishing and filling up the space of many universities. In addition, universities are, let's face it, places where something called the academic approach to literature, if we're sticking to literature for the moment, is the main practice. I think it was Mary Gordon who said - I may be mistaken - that writers read differently, that writers don't read the way professors read. I think she's absolutely right. For example, aside from the newfangled and overcomplicated and abstruse and almost unreadable theories that are being presented by professors at universities today, there is a kind of academic tradition where literature is presented to students (or students are introduced to literature) through the examination of texts, the breakdown of texts, the interpretation of texts; through the examination of the history of texts, the historical relations behind and around these texts. Now, it is my experience - I don't know how many people on the panel here will agree with me - that that is not the way writers read books. Writers see them as forms of writing, rather than forms of literature. They read writers as writers, and they read these books in terms of their mastery of the medium, in terms of their ability to convey certain very complicated and idiosyncratic notions, of both the self and of human experience in general. Now, my question is this: how do writers fit into this scheme? How do they relate to this academic atmosphere? Or don't they relate? Is there a conflict, or do they ignore this atmosphere? Do they belong in universities? I think Milosz said that European writers have a very loose relation, very often no relation, to universities. In this country, for example, many writers (not all, there are exceptions, of course) are now at universities and, as has been said, mostly for economic reasons. Would anybody like to respond?

Czeslaw Milosz: Yes, I have been with the university quite a long time here in this country. But before, I lived some ten years in Paris, and in order to avoid the American scene I shall speak of what I observed in Paris. Of late, in the last decades in Paris in the academic world, you saw a proliferation of theories, and those poor graduate students had to adapt their language each time to a new set of theories, a kind of professional mumbo-jumbo, because otherwise they wouldn't obtain their

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degrees. There is a real indoctrination going on. Of course there was a wave of Marxism and then structuralism and then poststructuralism, and so on and so on, and this for me as a writer is sheer mumbo-jumbo. So, I guess that observing the American scene, I would say that I would apply a good deal of skepticism, looking at those waves of new approaches to literature and to theories, for instance, which claim that after the death of philosophy and the sort of uncertain position of sciences, departments of literature are the most advanced posts of humanity.

William Phillips: Anybody else?

Cynthia Ozick: I think that writers while they are still students are entitled to have the traditional university that Mr. Milosz is talking about; namely, an institution willing to preserve the history of literature. I can't imagine what has become of the minds of young writers today since the sophomore survey course, for instance, disappeared. It was that course, among others, that dramatized the knowledge that we are not the first to be born on this earth, that what happens to us has happened before, that the venerable Bede's sparrow flying through the windows of the mead hall represents the brevity of human life, and is meant to signal across the centuries even to an eighteen-year-old in jeans. It seems to me that the history of ideas and the tonality of ideas, as embodied in the history of literature, is indispensable for any writer. I love the vigor and eloquence of Mary's mind. Nevertheless I am not in agreement that one ought to listen to what the young say. I think, yes, it's fine to be nourishing and sympathetic; it's more than fine, it's essential. But true nourishment and true sympathy come from understanding that the teacher knows more than the student. And why does the teacher know more? Because metaphorically speaking, the teacher is the one who has already assimilated the sophomore survey course.

Mary Gordon: Cynthia, I think there are ways of listening. I don't think you should have a monolithic model of listening. And I just don't think there's only one way of listening, and I think, as I said, you don't have to listen like a snivelling craven and say, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, you're younger than I am, you know more than I do." I think actually the reality of most students today and the reality of the university is that the sophomore survey is back. This is the nineties. So first of all, you may have a fantasy of what's going on at the university that's not true. But secondly, I think, one has to listen, to say, "What is it that you want?" and "What is important to you?" But then to say, "You know, this is what my history has been. I'm interested in your formation. I think that for your formation, the following things should obtain for the following

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good reasons," is a preferable model, I would think. You see, I think that if one speaks with a really genuinely felt confidence in the importance of the history of ideas and a great love for the history of literature, one can then list them and say, "However, in my experience this is what would be most helpful for you as a young mind and a developing writer." I can't help but think that's a better model than saying, "I'm not going to listen to you because I had the sophomore survey.

Cynthia Ozick: Mary, what actually do these students say to you? What do they tell you?

William Phillips: What they feel!

Mary Gordon: You say "what they feel" as if that were a dirty word. My students come to me often and say, "What should I read? What is important for me to read?" And you know what? They often listen to me.

William Phillips: I might just simply add that in my experience in teaching, which has been many years, I find the problem doesn't consist in the teacher listening but in the students listening - trying to get a student to listen!

I was thinking of throwing one more question at the panel and then opening up the discussion to the floor. There's been a certain amount of discussion, not only at these meetings but in the history of literary criticism – at least modern, contemporary literary criticism has been full of discussion of the question of extraliterary content. And the question arises: what do we mean by it? What is extraliterary? Definitions don't work very well because we're not in an exact science here, and the definitions are abstract and don't really illuminate the question, because in a certain sense, there is nothing extraliterary. Everything that goes on in existence gets in one way or another, at one time or another, into literature. And yet many people feel that an emphasis on the content (if not necessarily the extraliterary content) to the exclusion of the medium itself, or the way the content is treated in literature, is wrong and distorting. One of the approaches to this question, as most of you know, which goes back to Coleridge and was picked up by I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot, is to talk of the suspension of belief or disbelief. For instance, Eliot wrote that if you are an anti-Catholic or non-Cathlic, you cannot read Dante's *Divine Comedy* properly unless you suspend your own beliefs.

There's the question of anti-Semitism and antiblackism in literature. How do you read Eliot, who obviously was anti-Semitic to some extent; what do you do when you read Eliot? Cynthia Ozick has written

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about it. Now, my own sense is that it's a question of degree. I mean, some things really are extraliterary. Common sense and common experience usually permit writers and critics to understand when we're going too far and when we're not talking about extraliterary content.

Cynthia Ozick: If you are an English major, you simply take it as your premise that you are majoring in Christianity and as part and parcel of that you are majoring, at least a little, in the teaching of contempt, and you are majoring, at least a little, in canard. So once you sit as a young person in a classroom as an English major and take that as your premise, you have no further problem. That's simply what being an English major is. Is it worth it? Sure it's worth it. I have a friend, an English professor noted for consistency, who has thrown out all of English literature – he is not interested in it anymore – because he is so wounded by its endemic anti-Semitism. Of course, it isn't just English literature – it's European literature in general. But my feeling is: so what? I'm enough of an esthete to care about literature for the sentence, for the poetry. I do make a couple of exceptions, though – for Pound when he is rhymically ranting about "usury," and for someone like Simone Weil. I would take away from her all her accolades as a latterday saint and in particular the phrase that's always applied to her, "humanitarian." She was, quite simply, an anti-Semite (a Jewish version thereof), ignorantly virulent. I think it is possible to define a literary writer as a great writer albeit an anti-Semite; but you cannot tout anyone as a humanitarian albeit an anti-Semite. That doesn't work. You cannot be simultaneously a humanitarian and an anti-Semite, though you certainly can be a Dostoevsky and an anti-Semite, a Celine and an anti-Semite, an Eliot and an anti-Semite. For the latter I say, so what? What else do you expect of a tradition that has received deicide and supersessionism and the teaching of contempt with its mother's milk?

Mary Gordon: I think you also have to, as a woman, read a great deal of the history of literature knowing that you have been lied about, vilified, and perverted. And in the end, I think, like you, I say, "So what?" with a certain reservation. I think the pain needs to be acknowledged and we need to speak about the lies in anti-Semitism, in racism, and in sexism. We need to say, as you did, Cynthia, about Eliot (and I think that is a very important model for us): yes, this is great writing, this sentence is beautiful, his use of the metaphor and the natural image is peerless; however, in this particular part it is a lie and, as an engaged reader and lover of literature, it is my responsibility to say both.

Czeslaw Milosz: I have been teaching Dostoevsky and for me, the ba-

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sic problem in Dostoevsky is that he was a great writer and his obsessions - chauvinistic, racist obsessions - unfortunately were not something added, something on the margin of his greatness. His prophetic view, his depth of thought was intimately connected with his reactionary attitude. And this is an enigma. Because Dostoevsky was so concerned with Russia - he had only one heroine in his novels, that was Russia, of course - and because he was so strongly, negatively reacting to what was going on in the progressive Russia of his time, he had that pessimistic but very deep view. And this is something which is very disquieting in my opinion.

William Phillips: I'll take hands from the floor.

Roger Shattuck: I'd like to persuade the panel to address the question of the writer and the university a little more concretely. Cynthia Ozick gave us a series of very subtle, rhetorical questions about the relations between the writer and the university. But I'm thinking specifically of the students who come with a manuscript, with a group of poems, or a set of stories, and ask you first: what is the quality of these? And the next question is: what should I do? And let me point out that this situation contains an inherent conflict of interest. The person who is giving the advice, already being in the institution, has the possibility of advising that student to enter a college or university creative writing program. My advice to such a student for various reasons is: get out. Do something else. Shake the dust of the university off your feet and if you can't take it outside, you shouldn't be a writer in the first place. I would like to ask those of you who wish to answer, what is your advice to such a student?

Mary Gordon: I think it's a question of economics. And Roger, I agree with you completely, I always tell such students to go to Europe and get jobs in restaurants for a while. And I think they need to get out of the stink of the ivy very much. But to answer this seriously (and it is a question I seriously do have to confront with students): What is the best way when they're not twenty-five or twenty-eight, and they want to get married and have children and maybe would like a place that has hot running water? And perhaps more critically, how can you shape a life in which there is enough time to write? I think it's a very vexed, very painful question. Because if you do, as many of us had to do, take some sort of job, as you get older and you get into your thirties and you lose energy and have other responsibilities for which you need money, what is the best way to live a life and still be able to read and write? And I think after the students get to be over thirty, one less and less has the luxury of being romantic in advising them what to do. After a while they don't want to work in the Seven-Eleven store any more. And then where do

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they go? I don't know. But because of that, I want to be realistic about what options are open to them. Because the chances of any young serious writer being able to support himself or herself and children by writing is very small. So perhaps a humane way of doing that over the age of thirty is to somehow hook on to an academic setting.

William Phillips: Anyone else want to answer the question?

Cynthia Ozick: Maybe I will. A student of mine is in this audience, so I guess I have to be careful. It's been a very long time since I "ran" a "writers' workshop." I was completely enchanted by it and totally consumed by it, and everybody in that seminar became a kind of child of mine. And since then I've never wanted to do it again. I in a sense have never shaken off any of those students. They keep sending me manuscripts and letters, and I keep sending love letters back. And I feel it and mean it. But if I were to tell the truth, which I assume I am here to do, or at least some of it, I don't think a writer who is going to be the real thing has any business going to a writers' workshop at all. It's true that a workshop can be a kindly place, although it can also be, as Mary described, a dog-eat-dog situation, and one has to work very very hard as a leader of a seminar to get rid of the dog-eat-dog atmosphere and to make it into a community. But if you want to talk about what makes a writer, it's the gift and it's persistence. To turn oneself into a writer is very, very difficult, it's one of the more perilous compulsions to follow. You've got to find yourself some patron, decide to be a parasite on a husband or a friend or whatever, or in some cases a university, yes. But there really are only two things that count: how strong your gift is and how much you're willing to persist. Nothing else counts; everything else is illusion or entertainment. A workshop will not give you the gift, and it will not give you the character to persist.

Leslie Epstein: I teach creative writing at Boston University. You can teach it. You get a lot of criticism, which you then take into your writing: how to be a critic, whether you leave the words on the page or take them out. But that isn't what I got up here for to talk about. I went to a fine American university in Mary Gordon's fifties; it was Yale, and I go back in the nineties because my daughter is an undergraduate there. It is an infinitely better place now than it was when I was an undergraduate - partly because my daughter can be a student there. There were no Asians then, virtually no blacks, exactly ten percent Jews. It is an exciting and diverse and rather wonderful place now. Then, it was sons of stockbrokers learning how to go into the stockmarket, and how to be fathers of more stockbrokers. Right after I left Yale, I went to Ox-

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ford. Same story. And in some ways, Oxford (another pillar of the West) was even worse. I knew one student who was told he should stay for an extra year because he hadn't mastered the accent yet. T. S. Eliot offered his manuscripts to the library of my college, Merton. They were turned down because he wasn't sufficiently dead yet. I imagine Oxford is a much better place now, too. The trouble with these great and glorious places now is that students don't know anything when they get there. But what I find with my undergraduate students is that they are heartbreakingly eager to learn when they find out how little they know. I don't know if that was a question or a comment.

Natalie Gerber: I'm sorry. I walked out but I had to come back. I was almost insulted by many of the comments regarding the writer and the university, and I'd like to respond for the students. The role of the writer at the university: I'd like to talk about a story by I. L. Peretz. It's called "The Hermit." Maybe the hermit who lies down with the bear can't wake the soul of the sleeping world, but he can wake the soul of one student, and that's what the writer is here for. It's not to promulgate the role of literature in the world; it's to help the student, to awaken the student. The canon isn't so important because I can read a great book that might not mean anything to me at this point. If a writer can awaken something in me, and I come across books that at that point are important to me, that shapes my life. And while a professor can ask you to criticize the literature of dead people and put down thoughts that you get out of criticism of all the old great masters, the writer asks you to criticize your own ability and your capacity for thought. (I'm shaking. I'm sorry. I'm not used to criticizing the intelligentsia of the world.) Also, what really insulted me is the idea that you can't ask students for their thoughts. Because students might not be as well versed in the literature that you know, but there are also other genres which have a history of ideas - music and film are also vital arts today. You can't tell me that they also aren't important. Thank you.

Edith Kurzweil: I'm glad that the student spoke up, because I was going to say something slightly different, but to that point. I think that we're all addressing the fact that students are different now, that the culture has changed and in fact has changed for the students as well. And we here, I think, cannot agree on how to deal with this change. Or how to impart the fact that things have changed or that students come here with a different kind of preparation than the preparation we had. Let me be a bit biographical. For biographical reasons I have been exposed to all three cultures: to French, German and English literature, when I went to school. But I must say that I was introduced to some of

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Schiller's poetry in second grade, and to Goethe's in fifth grade, and also in fifth grade to a map of Paris when I started to learn French in Vienna, before moving to Belgium. What we are to some extent saying here is that the students who enter the university do not have the kind of background reading, the culture, that we sort of expect. So when we talk of the canon, which none of us likes, we're just saying, well, what is it that we shall impart in the quickest possible way to make up for the things which we would have liked those students to have read already? As Wilson Moses said yesterday, his mother read Shakespeare to him. Thank you.

William Phillips: If I understood Roger Shattuck's remarks, perhaps I misunderstood him, I thought that he was also emphasizing the fact that remaining within the orbit of the university is a way of restricting the experience of a writer.

Mark Mirsky: I just want to speak very briefly. I was a little horrified by Roger Shattuck's remarks because I also run a creative writing program - the one in which Cynthia Ozick was hired and Harold Brodkey taught. I was also thrown out of the university by my professor, Albert Garrard. He didn't want me to go on and take a doctorate but to go out and be a writer and not commit the mistake that perhaps he felt he had made. And I'm very grateful that he threw me out. But I'm also grateful that I got back in. And I can't just buy, Cynthia, that it was all hoak. You were certainly the most wonderful teacher I hired at City College, and I know how your students worshipped you. And I also knew the big bite of flesh they took out of you. But I also know that they were changed forever, and I don't think you'd have it any other way. I think you taught just as long as you could - unfortunately, briefly - and then got out for your own sake. Since I ran a creative writing program I got many notes from deans and professors saying: justify this. And as a writer I felt I didn't have to justify it, because it was a place for people to survive. Plenty of people came in who had been waiters, who had wandered around Europe. You know, I have students with H.I.V. and who have been through a horror show. And they land in a creative writing workshop for a semester or two, and then they go on. We don't have political parties funding writers anymore. We don't have the world of the Polish intelligentsia that I've read in Milosz's fantastic dialogue with Wat. That world doesn't exist in New York and doesn't exist in the United States. The writing workshops were a place for people to come together in a kind of community for a brief time. The very fact that you're sitting here today, rather than sponsored by an independent political journal - that *Partisan Review* sits at Boston University -

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speaks to the fact that the university is a patron. When someone else appears as a patron, writers will go somewhere else. I think it's a little bit of an act - typical of writers, and I think we have to do it - but it's a little bit selfish of us to spit on the university quite so hard when the university has been our patron.

But I agree with everything the panel has said. The university is a dangerous patron. It's always behind the times, and I think the writer has to be in trouble with it. But I just can't let the notion that the writing workshop is all hoak go by. Maybe because I've spent too much of my own time in it, I just think of it as a piece of a community.

Lionel Abel: I'd like to address the really difficult question that was raised by Cynthia - the question of literary anti-Semitism. And I think it is a much more difficult question than she assumes it to be. I agree that we should be critical of even gifted writers who hold anti-Semitic views. But when we begin to talk about Dostoevsky as an anti-Semitie, we are not dealing with his most deeply held views. He was anti-Semitic, to some extent. But I think this appears much more clearly in the journalistic writings of Dostoevsky than in his novels. I was never aware of it in reading his novels, and I would like to point out that André Gide, in a very good little book on Dostoevsky, noted that his characters are much more intelligent than Dostoevsky himself, that is to say, if you compare the ideas expressed by characters in his novels with the notions Dostoevsky expresses in his journalism, there's a great difference of quality, and a higher quality is evident in the opinions put forth by his characters. And I never noticed any anti-Semitic (although there are anti-Polish) remarks made in *The Brothers Karamazov*. So I think the question of Dostoevsky's anti-Semitism is a very difficult one. Moreover, I'm told by people who know Russian literature better than I, that every single Russian writer except Tolstoy expressed anti-Semitic views. In fact, even Chekhov, who is not generally known to have had such views, is said to have held them. Now we are not going to throw out the whole of Russian literature. We cannot make this question of anti-Semitism so important in the reading of Russian writers. And as for Tolstoy, I was told by Leo Steinberg that he, Tolstoy, confessed that he often wanted to express anti-Semitic views but fortunately, he said, was able to resist the impulse.

I can't accept either the idea of Cynthia's that Simone Weil was anti-Semitic. There are in Simone Weil judgments of Judaism and of Jewish views which I think are unfortunate. But I also think freedom of thought is a real value, even in someone who derogates Jewish thinking. There is not in Simone Weil the slightest desire to organize non-Jews against Jews, and that I think is essential to an anti-Semitic position.

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There is no impulse in her that I can discern to bring Christians together against Jews, defined as objectionable beings.

William Phillips: We'll close the meeting with the responses of the speakers. Who wants to go first?

Czeslaw Milosz: I feel that Dostoevsky's anti-Semitic views have been blown out of proportion. His hatred of Catholicism was much stronger, and his hatred of Poles, his hatred of Frenchmen. But I said that some reactionary views of Dostoevsky were intimately related to his greatness, and you are completely right that those things are primarily in his journalism. And they receive a sort of transformation in fiction on a higher level because, as was said rightly, his characters are maybe more intelligent than Dostoevsky. But the link between his reactionary journalism and his novels is in my opinion much more intimate than people would like to think. About Simone Weil: You see, I don't see anti-Semitism in Simone Weil. She was very Jewish, and she rejected the Old Testament; she rejected the Old Testament because she rejected Rome. She rejected Thomas Aquinas. And it was connected with her sympathies with Manichaeism, which is of course anti-Old Testament. That was a religious option.

Mary Gordon: To place Simone Weil in a historical context, what year did she reject the Old Testament? And in fact, she would not register as a Jew in her personal life. A year in which one's fellow Jews are being executed is not the time to take the position of witness that she deliberately took. And in that position of witness, I think she has to be called an anti-Semite. To perform that particular act in that particular year – it could have been a complicated act – you could not call that anything else but anti-Semitic.

Daphne Merkin: I'm a writer and on the Editorial Board of *Partisan Review*. The question of anti-Semitism and Jewishness interests me highly, having come from an Orthodox Jewish background, having written a novel (a portion of which appeared in *The New Yorker*) which ended up in a debate with William Shawn on the correct spelling of shabbas. This is really in response to Cynthia. I think when one gets into discussion, brilliantly analyzed in Cynthia's essay in *The New Yorker,* of the questionable character as evidenced in the anti-Semitic bent (or more than bent) of T. S. Eliot, you're getting into the larger territory - which would make a very interesting subject for another panel - of character and talent. They do not all go hand in hand. And I think that somehow the focusing on the overt anti-Semitism or covert anti-Semitism of a

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Dostoevsky or an Eliot is to try and reduce a very complex question of integrity (for lack of a better word) versus gift: whether integrity or humanity goes along with gift. This was something that was discussed in a book by Paul Johnson, *The Intellectuals*, that I found interesting and that was largely negatively reviewed, except in the so-called neoconservative press, in which he debated the whole notion of goodness, badness, humanity versus talent. So my point would be that that subject should be opened up to include other pernicious traits besides anti-Semitism.

William Phillips: Thank you. That's for another conference. We've run way over our time, so we must close. I want to say just two things: One, we obviously haven't solved many questions, but as I said on an earlier occasion, those questions which we can't solve we're going to declare insoluble. I want to thank our panel. And I want to thank our audience. You remember Walt Whitman's famous remark that you can't have great literature without great audiences. Thank you.

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Afterthoughts

Conferences can always be improved in retrospect. Many years ago, I went to a conference, under semireligious auspices, on morality and art. I have forgotten why I went. The discussion was rather simple-minded and reductive. But I was surprised to find Hannah Arendt there. We went to lunch, and I asked her how she could stand the nonsense being dispensed with such passion and seriousness. She said to me, "William, you don't understand the iron law of conferences. If forty geniuses come to a conference, they will all talk nonsense."

The truth is that this iron law did not apply to our conference at Boston University, "The Changing Culture of the University." I don't know how many geniuses were there. But the nonsense was minimal and intermittent. The level was almost continuously high, and many people, including myself, said that it was by far the best conference they had ever attended. If not all of the crucial questions were answered, most of them were addressed. A few weren't. Most of the papers and much of the discussion were thoughtful, often subtle and complex, and usually to the point.

There were bound to be disagreements. But most people felt that the universities were being hurt by the attacks on the so-called canon and on Western civilization. Obviously, the disagreements led to lively debates, but perhaps a more homogeneous conference would have been more fruitful.

Though I had some disagreements with the views they expressed, the papers that led off the discussion were first-rate. However, some questions, perhaps inevitably, perhaps because of their complexity, were left hanging. After all, even the best of conferences cannot solve all the complicated esthetic and social problems that have not been resolved in the entire history of literary criticism.

One such question is a large one: the relation of literature to life. Robert Alter said in his paper that the new theorists – the feminist literary theorists, the black theorists, the multiculturalists, the Marxists – brought extraliterary criteria into the discussion of literature. Donoghue and others objected that there are no extra-literary criteria, for literature is a compound of extraliterary experience, and we cannot exclude this experience in response to literary material. Steven Marcus said in his comment that we recognize literary merit, but that a judgment about merit entailed extraliterary considerations. The point, I take it, is that though all of existence enters into a literary work and into our response to it, ultimately we must apply literary standards. For literature has to be judged by the quality of its conversion of what it has absorbed from life

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into a new entity. This is what Alter meant when he said that the attacks on tradition usually represented extraliterary considerations that reflected a political agenda. Thus, to dismiss a work because of antifeminist or anti-Semitic sentiments embodied in it is to ignore the qualities that might have made it, nevertheless, an outstanding work and an important part of our literary tradition.

Another problem that could have been explored further is that of mass education. Though not directly related to the issue of revising the curriculum, the conversion of the colleges from elite to mass education does bear on the kind of courses of study that can be absorbed by unprepared students. Yet this appears to be a ticklish issue that most educators as well as the new theorists do not care to touch.

Those who spoke for feminist literary theory, for multiculturalism, against the literary tradition, and against the so-called canon were in the main articulate, impassioned, and earnest. But in my opinion they underplayed the extent of the revisions that are being advocated and are taking place in many of our universities. Their strongest argument was that the tradition has never been frozen, and that it has always been subject to changes of taste and judgment. However, they exaggerated the extent of the changes, for most of them have taken place within a general consensus. They called attention to such examples of fluctuating reputations as Shakespeare, Milton, Melville. But in most of these instances the shift has been one of sensibility, as viewed by later writers and critics. And the question of their popularity is confused with judgments by sophisticated literary opinion.

On the whole, I think radical revisionists do not seem to want to comprehend how traditions are created. Sometimes the revisionists seem to believe that literary values and traditions are created by academics, which is surely a self-inflationary and eccentric view of the sources of traditions and values. They sometimes appear not to understand that academic curricula usually have followed advanced literary opinion, and that professors have chosen courses of study from a traditional consensus. The multiculturalists and challengers of the very idea of a tradition do not seem to be aware that traditions in the arts and in the area of ideas have been perpetuated by writers, artists, critics, and thinkers in the various cultural fields.

The Sunday morning panel concluding the conference brought a different perspective to the questions about the changing culture of the university, by engaging some of the issues from a more explicitly literary point of view. Most of the speakers are writers; some of them are also teachers, some teach occasionally. Czeslaw Milosz referred indirectly to the gap between the new academic theories and the interests of writers by citing the indifference of French students to the abstruse ideas some of

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their instructors tried to present to them. And Cynthia Ozick implied that literature was being academicized when she argued quite forcefully but modestly that writing could not be taught as an academic subject. One was left with the feeling that writers were estranged not from the more traditional life of the university but from the new politicized esthetics rampant in the university, that has distorted its functions.

I should add that since my own interests are primarily literary, I've been emphasizing this aspect of the conference. But there were many observations that reached beyond literature and the humanities. The disagreements, as I have suggested, were mostly on an elevated level of thought and civility. So far as I know, this was the most representative and most impressive gathering of writers and critics who question the current efforts to revise the curriculum. And those who advocate change were also ably represented. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Fund, Inc., which jointly funded the conference, should be pleased with the results.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

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Coming in

Partisan Review:

- **Leszek Kolakowski:** The Decline of Historicism
- **Philippe Raynaud:** Feminism and the *Ancien Régime*
- **James Dickey:** *from* To the White Sea
- **Robert Alter:** Vladimir Nabokov
- **Susan Dunn:** Revolutionary Myths in France and America
- **Shlomo Avineri:** Reflections on Eastern Europe
- **Donald Davie:** Three Pastors in Berlin
- **Peter Loewenberg:** The Uses of Anxiety
- **Morris Dickstein:** Recent American Fiction
- **Walter Laquer:** The Intellectual Impact of Communism's Collapse
- **Herbert Gold:** A Blazing Incident

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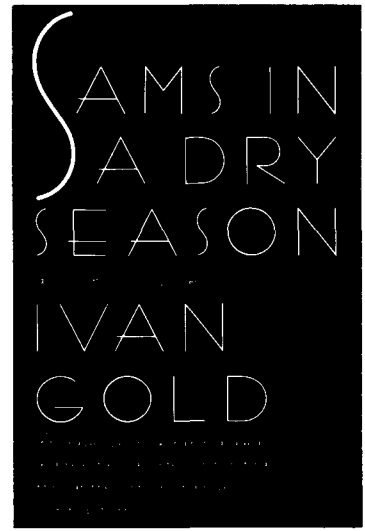

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Essays Presented to Donald Davie

edited by Vereen Bell and Laurence Lerner

Contributors: Vereen Bell, Bernard Bergonzi, Thom Gunn, Robert von Hallberg, George Mills Harper, Seamus Heaney, Mark Jarman, Gabriel Josipovici, James Kilroy, Laurence Lerner, Alasdair MacIntyre, William Pratt, Claude Rawson, C.K. Stead, Charles Tomlinson, and Helen Vendler.

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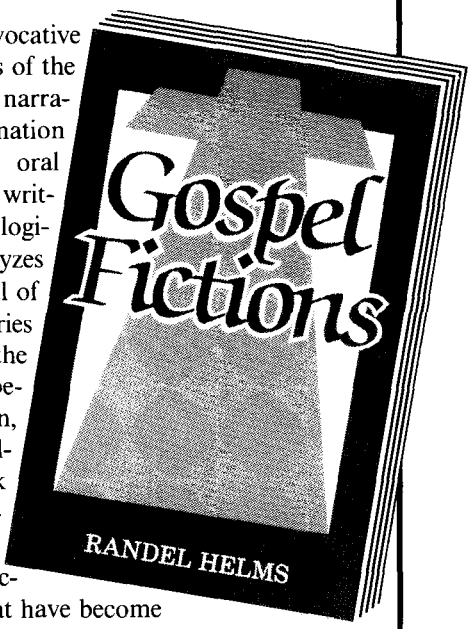

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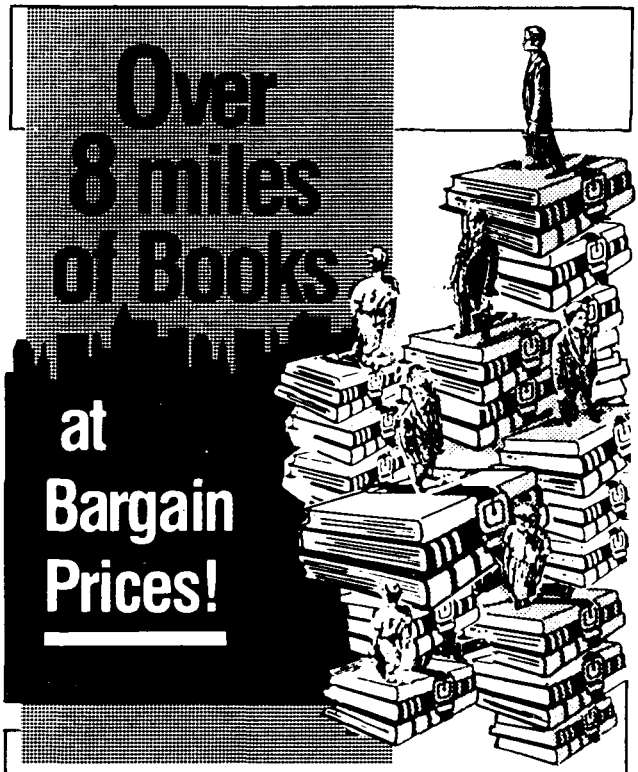

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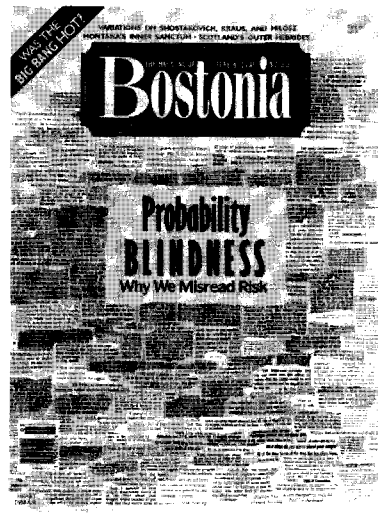

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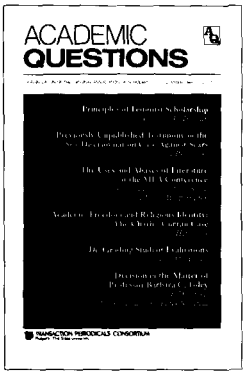

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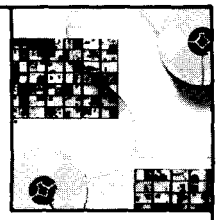

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